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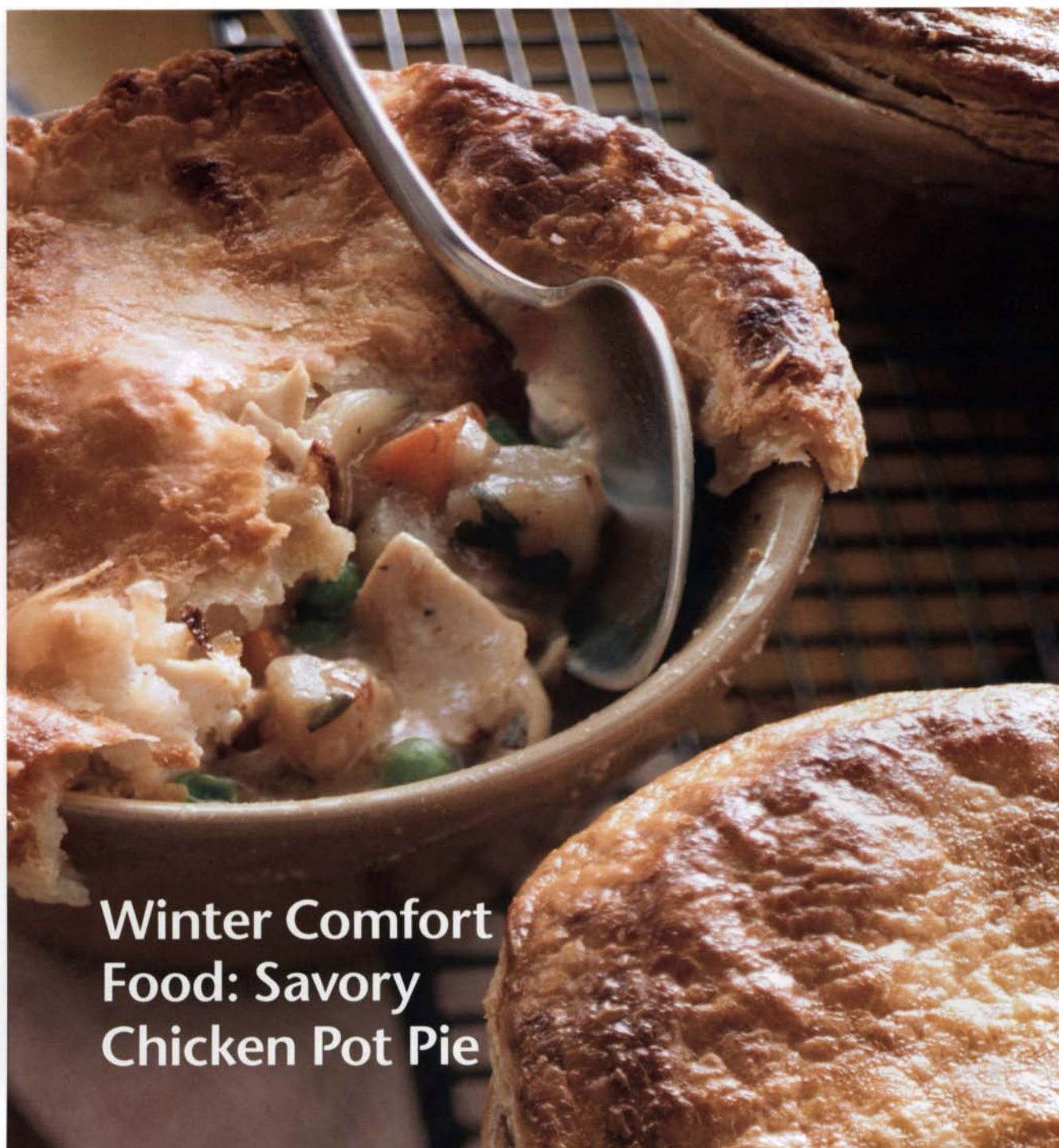
**How to Make  
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FEBRUARY/MARCH 1996 ISSUE 13

## DEPARTMENTS

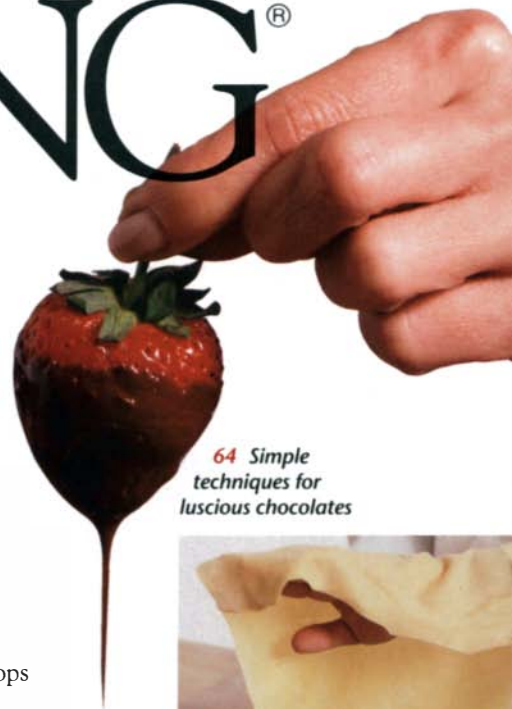
- 4 Letters
- 8 At the Market  
*Cabbage*
- 10 Q&A *Choosing pine-apples, cooking fish in lime juice*
- 14 Notes *Wine guide, Fishers Island Oysters*
- 16 Technique Class  
*Stir-frying*
- 20 Tips
- 68 Basics *Measuring ingredients accurately*
- 72 Food Science  
*Storing vegetables*
- 74 Flavorings  
*Fish sauce*
- 76 Reviews  
*Southern cookbooks*
- 78 Calendar
- 84 Advertiser Index
- 85 Recipe & Technique Index
- 85 Nutrition Information
- 86 Tidbits

**On the cover:** *Chicken pot pie warms a chilly night, p. 24.*

Cover photo, Alan Richardson. This page: top and middle, Ellen Silverman; bottom, Susan Kahn.

## ARTICLES

- 24 **Chicken Pot Pie Warms a Chilly Night**  
*by Cathie Guntli* Roast the chicken and vegetables for bigger flavors in the filling
- 29 **Fresh, Briny-Sweet Mussels** *by Molly Stevens*  
Steaming is the first step to unlocking the flavor of these easy-to-cook shellfish  
Mussels can be wild or cultivated 30
- 34 **The Salad in Winter** *by Odessa Piper*  
Some vegetables and greens are best when the mercury drops
- 38 **The Art of Menu-Making** *by Paul Bertolli*  
The best meals celebrate the season and the bounty of the market
- 44 **Adding Flavor to Butter** *by Renie Steves*  
Just soften and stir to make beautiful compound butters
- 46 **Citrus Fruits Brighten Dessert**  
*by Andrew MacLauchlan* At their best in winter, oranges, grapefruits, lemons, and limes offer refreshing flavors and colors  
Delicious and unexpected citrus flavor combinations 50
- 51 **Boston Brown Bread Cooks in a Steamer**  
*by Judy Monroe* Molasses flavors the bread; steaming makes it moist
- 54 **Master Class: Making Handkerchief Pasta**  
*by Alan Tardi* An inlay of fresh herbs makes this delicate pasta a fragrant partner for a seafood filling
- 58 **Savory Latin-American Turnovers**  
*by Doug Rodriguez* Wrap pastry around a richly flavored filling and you've made an empanada
- 62 **Clean Cuts with a Chinese Cleaver**  
*by Barbara Tropp* Well balanced and razor sharp, this versatile knife can become your most treasured kitchen tool
- 64 **A Simple Method for Tempering Chocolate**  
*by Mark Gray* Make shiny, mouthwatering chocolate candies with this easy-to-master technique



64 Simple techniques for luscious chocolates



54 Handkerchief pasta—beauty and flavor in one dough



29 Mussels with a Mediterranean tomato sauce and pasta

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If you'd like to share your thoughts on topics like genetically engineered tomatoes, our most recent baking article, or your food and cooking philosophies, here's the place to do so. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506.

## Fromage blanc with creamy texture but light fat count

I read with interest your June/July issue (*Fine Cooking* #9); lots of great pointers and recipes. In the Q&A section, there was a question from Valerie Gayton-Caspersen concerning the fresh cheese called *fromage blanc* (also called *fromage frais*). In her reply, Ricki Carroll, owner of New England Cheesemaking Supply, included a method for making *fromage blanc* from milk or light cream. I offer a recipe for a low-fat *fromage blanc*, developed by French chef Michel Guérard, which is delicious and blends into any sauce just as though it were butter.

### MICHEL GUERARD'S FROMAGE BLANC

(Adapted from *Cuisine Minceur*, by Michel Guérard, English translation, Morrow, 1976):

To make 1 pint: Combine in a blender 1 pint (2 cups) low-fat ricotta cheese, 5 level table-spoons plus 1 teaspoon of low-fat plain yogurt, and a pinch of salt.

(It's very important that the ricotta be as fresh as possible in order to get a smooth texture. Check the "last sale" date on the container when you buy it to be sure the date is at least a good month away.)

Blend the mixture at high speed and taste several times. The object is to purée the ricotta until there's no trace of graininess.

Cover and refrigerate the *fromage blanc* for 12 hours before using.

Hope your readers who are health-conscious enjoy this delicious substitute.

—Donald R. Kester,  
Nassau, Bahamas

## Try growing your own lemongrass

In Alexandra Greeley's article on lemongrass (*Flavorings*, *Fine Cooking* #11, p. 92), she neglected one major source for procuring it—the garden. About two years ago, I rooted a stalk from a bunch I had bought at the market, and I've had a steady supply ever since. The lemongrass grows quite happily in a pot on my balcony. It withstands cold winters and thrives in the summer.

To root, simply pull away several of the dead outer leaves until you see small bumps near the end of the stalk. Put the stalk in water, change the water frequently, and in about two weeks, roots will sprout and the lemongrass will be ready to plant.

—Stacey Callahan,  
Toulouse, France

## Get the facts on plastic before you preach

Before responding to Cyndy Ainsworth's letter criticizing reader Ray Overton's use of disposable zip-top plastic bags (*Fine Cooking* #10, p. 4), I'd like to tell you that I am in the plastic packaging business, but my company does not manufacture zip-top bags.

With respect to the environmental issues alluded to by Ms. Ainsworth, my company and I have received international recognition for our work in pollution prevention and resource conservation. I've spoken about plastics and the environment at many governmental hearings and at universities in the U.S. and abroad. So, although I come from the plastics industry, I do so with a strong sense

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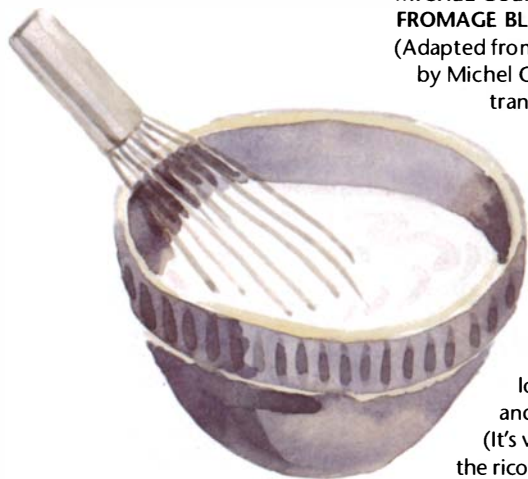
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# LETTERS

of commitment and a record of achievement in pollution prevention based on facts and science, not tired, worn environmental urban myths.

Ray Overton's tips about the convenience of plastic bags were right on target. Ms. Ainsworth's fears and opposing assertions were off the mark. The reason she's come to believe there is some guilt to ascribe to contemporary convenience is because of a long-time misinformation campaign by the paper industry against plastics.

Scientific studies in Germany, the U.S., Canada, and even by the National Audubon Society comparing plastic bags to paper bags have concluded that on all environmental counts—air, water, solid waste, and even energy—plastic bags are far kinder to the environment.

—George A. Makrauer,  
Cincinnati, OH

## The chicken or the wife?

I'm writing in defense of the roasted chicken technique proposed by Mitchel London in "Roasting a Chicken to Perfection," *Fine Cooking* #4. John Wilson's letter in *Fine Cooking* #7 complained that the method caused his oven to smoke, and that his wife said she'd divorce him if he

tried the chicken again.

I think Wilson's problem is human error, not an error with the technique. I have made this dish four times, and I didn't have any problem. The first time, I cooked it in a large iron skillet that has two-inch sides. The recipe says to remove some fat during cooking, but I didn't do that. (I always pull the fat out of the cavity before I cook it.) This chicken was so good I could have eaten the whole thing.

I next decided to roast two chickens at the same time. I



baked them in a heavy roasting pan with about two-inch sides and again had no splattering of fat. I did use lots of garlic in the cavity and on the outside, plus rosemary in and all over the bird. This is one of the best things I've done. It's so good that I'd divorce the wife and eat the chicken.

—Christine Tallent,  
Houston, TX

## Free software reviews from the government

In response to a reader's re-

quest for recipe software resources, I suggest contacting the Food & Nutrition Information Center at the Department of Agriculture's Natural Agricultural Library. The library maintains a comprehensive database of food and nutrition software and multimedia programs.

Callers choose from four software categories: Recipe & Diet Analysis for Consumers, Nutrient Analysis, Nutrition Education, and Programs for Foodservice & the Food Industry. After placing an order, I received a package in seven days, and was impressed with the number of software programs reviewed—62 in the Recipe & Diet Analysis category alone.

Reviews include company name, phone number, address, cost, type of program, target audience, hardware requirements, and more. The library does not rate the programs, but it does provide an excellent resource page of books, articles, and online services that do rate programs.

To place an order or to request a catalog, call 301/504-5719, fax 301/504-5408, TTY 301/504-6856, or Internet e-mail [fnic@nals.usda.gov](mailto:fnic@nals.usda.gov). All publications are free.

—Tom Iselin,  
Sun Valley, ID

## Slicer sources

Many readers have asked where to buy the Benriner slicer, featured in Notes, *Fine Cooking* #12. Here are two stores that carry the slicer:

**Katagiri & Co., Inc.**, 224 East 59th St., New York, NY 10022; 212/838-5453; fax, 212/752-4197.

**Uwajimaya**, 519 Sixth Ave. South, Seattle, WA 98104; 800/877-6380 or 206/624-6248. ♦

The Taunton Press is looking for an associate editor for *Kitchen Garden* magazine, a new bi-monthly vegetable-gardening magazine with a slant on cooking and garden design. We're looking for a journalist who is also an enthusiastic vegetable gardener and cook. Candidates should have at least three years of magazine or newspaper experience and proven writing and editing skills. Travel is required to work directly with our authors in developing articles for the magazine. Photographic skills are an asset. We offer a competitive salary, an excellent benefits package, and a pleasant work environment. Send letter and resumé to Personnel Department, The Taunton Press, Inc., PO Box 5506, 63 South Main Street, Newtown, CT 06470.

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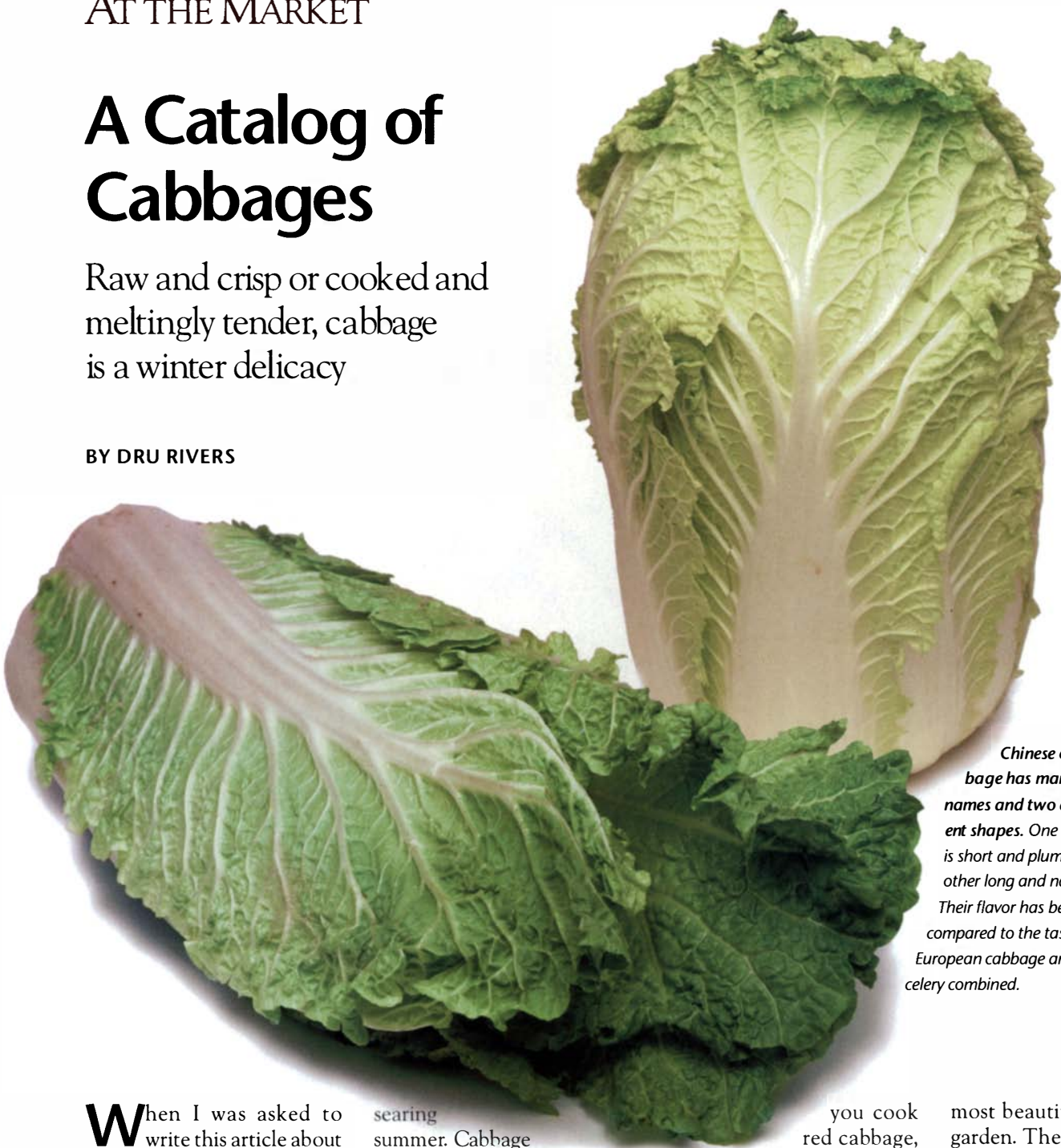
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*Give your cuisine the royal touch.*

# A Catalog of Cabbages

Raw and crisp or cooked and meltingly tender, cabbage is a winter delicacy

BY DRU RIVERS



*Chinese cabbage has many names and two different shapes. One variety is short and plump, the other long and narrow. Their flavor has been compared to the tastes of European cabbage and celery combined.*

**W**hen I was asked to write this article about cabbage, I started to cry. The temperature on our farm that day was 113°F. I was surrounded by pallets of melons, mounds of beans, and stacks of tomatoes, all needing to be sorted, boxed, and labeled. But after I hung up the telephone, all I could think of was cabbage.

Here in the desert of California's west central valley, cabbage is a sign of brisk, late-autumn days and fertile soil springing to life again after a

searing summer. Cabbage means rain and soup and warm kitchens—all those things I can't help but cry for in the dog days of August.

**There are three basic types of European cabbage:** green, red, and Savoy. The green is sometimes called Dutch white. Its leaves are smooth, tight, and pale to medium green.

Heads of red cabbage—usually smaller and denser than the green—have a pleasantly peppery taste. When

you cook red cabbage, add an acidic ingredient (like vinegar) to help the cabbage hold its color; otherwise, it turns a grayish blue. Always use stainless-steel knives and pans when preparing red cabbage—carbon steel will discolor the leaves. And never cover it with aluminum foil while cooking; use parchment or a brown paper bag instead.

**Savoy cabbages, with their large, crinkly, blue-green leaves,** are one of the

most beautiful sights in the garden. The leaves are thinner than other cabbages, and they have the richest flavor, making Savoy ideal for serving raw in salads. But the Savoy is delicious for cooked dishes, too, and it doesn't have the same strong odor as other cabbages. Savoys don't keep as well as other cabbages, though, so buy them only when you plan to use them.

**Chinese cabbage is also widely available.** You may find it called Napa cabbage, Chinese celery, Michihli, or



*Red cabbage has a lusty, slightly peppery flavor that's ideal for braises and stews.*



*The ruffled, blue-green leaves of a Savoy cabbage are tender and crisp, with a more delicate taste than that of other cabbage varieties.*

*The sweet and mild-tasting Dutch White is an all-purpose cabbage. Enjoy it raw or cooked.*



Chinese leaf. Sometimes the heads are long and narrow with leaves that curve toward the heart; the other variety is shorter with wrinkled leaves that fan away from the head. The leaves of either variety are thinner than European cabbages and have a more delicate flavor—perfect for shredding and eating raw in salads. A common ingredient in stir-fries and soups, Chinese cabbages are

also luscious when slowly braised.

**Cabbages harvested in late fall and winter tend to be sweeter.** Although cabbages are available year-round, cold weather enhances their flavor, as the starches turn to sugar after the frost. Once harvested, both white and red cabbage can be kept in cold storage for weeks without any loss of flavor.

When choosing any variety of cabbage, look for firm, tightly packed heads with no signs of browning. Euro-

pean cabbages should feel hard and heavy for their size.

Keep the heads sealed in plastic wrap and store them in the vegetable drawer in your refrigerator. Don't wash cabbages before you store them—the extra moisture will speed deterioration.

If you plan to eat your cabbage raw, use it within three or four days. Cabbage that you plan to cook will remain fine for about two weeks—with the exception of Savoy,

which should be used by the fourth day.

Unfortunately, most of us know the smell of cabbage that has stayed too long on the stove. The longer cabbage cooks, the stronger and more sulfurous its flavor. A brief cooking time (just until tender) is a good general rule for cabbage cooks.

---

*Dru Rivers is a partner at Full Belly Farms in Guinda, California. ♦*

Have a question of general interest about cooking?

Send it to *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, and we'll try to find a cooking professional with the answer.

## Give pineapples the thump test

*How can you tell if a pineapple is ripe? And if you buy an unripe pineapple, do you put it in the refrigerator to ripen it, or leave it out on the counter?*

—Julie Berrocco, Denver, CO

**Barbara Gray replies:** Pineapples seem to be associated with a number of myths, such as that they're ripe when you can easily pull out a leaf. In reality, the best way to tell if a pineapple is ripe is to thump the inside of your wrist and then thump the pineapple. The two sounds should be the same. If the pineapple doesn't give a solid thump, or if it has any mushy brown spots, pass. Also, sniff the base of the pineapple; a sweet pineapple will smell sweet. If it smells sour or fermented, it is.

No matter where you store it, a pineapple won't get any riper after it has been picked. Storage is a matter of whether you like your pineapple chilled

or not. Either way, a pineapple has about four or five good days after picking. *Barbara Gray is the director of Food Consultants of Hawaii in Honolulu.*

## Washing wax off produce

*I like the tang that lemon zest gives, but I don't like the thought of eating the wax that coats the lemon. What does it take to wash the wax off fruits and vegetables?*

—Juliette Curtis, San Jose, CA

**Margaret Wittenberg replies:** Washing fruits and vegetables with a mild, unscented dishwashing soap will remove some of the wax, but not all of it. Peeling is the only way you can remove all the wax that producers put on fruits and vegetables to extend shelf life.

Obviously, peeling isn't an option when it's the peel you want to use. The concern goes deeper than just unpleasant waxiness, however; if the lemon was treated with pesticides, they're embedded in the wax. If you want to be absolutely sure you're not eating wax or pesticides, buy organic fruit.

*Margaret Wittenberg is the author of Good Food—The Complete Guide to Eating Well (Crossing Press, 1995).*

## Chopping onions without tears

*Is there a way to chop onions that won't irritate your eyes?*

—Stephen Pepper, Brookline, MA

**Nancy Teksten replies:** When you cut an onion, you're cutting through the onion's cells

and releasing sulfuric compounds. These compounds react with the moisture in your eyes and create a mild form of sulfuric acid.

To prevent this reaction, try chilling the onion before you cut it; a cold onion doesn't release its compounds as quickly as a warm one. Also, the greatest concentration of sulfuric compounds collects at the root end; leave it on until the onion is peeled and chopped.

There is one benefit to the onion's irritation; the acidic tears' acid will clear your tear ducts of any air pollution residue.

*Nancy Teksten is the promotion director of the National Onion Association in Greeley, Colorado.*

## Why almond paste has a long life

*I have an unopened package of almond paste in my kitchen cabinet that's been there for at least two years. Can I still eat it? What is it made of, and what do you use it for? And if it isn't rotten by now, why isn't it?*

—Jeanne Huber, St. Paul, MN

**Sebastian Brecht replies:** If your almond paste has been stored away from light and heat, it may still be in good condition.

Formulations vary, but almond paste is made from equal amounts of almonds and sugar that have been ground together by heavy-duty machines to form a fine, firm paste. The nut oil tends to break down fairly quickly, but the sugar in almond paste acts as a preservative and stabilizer. Taste will tell you if it's





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1 tablespoon fresh cilantro, chopped  
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3 green onions, chopped

Blend first 7 ingredients in a food processor or blender until smooth. Fold in tomatoes and green onions.

Variation: ½ cup chopped sweet pepper or red onion can be added to this delicious spread or dip.

Serve with pita bread, crackers, raw vegetables, or chips.



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fresh. If the almond paste is soft, smooth, and doesn't have any off flavors, it's fine to use.

As a component in cakes, almond paste provides moistness, a longer shelf life, and the sweet flavor of almonds. Almond paste also can be added to streusel mixtures to top fruit tarts. Almond paste is closely related to marzipan (that's almond paste with glucose and confectioners' sugar added to it), but they can't be substituted for each other. Marzipan is mostly used to mold edible figurines, while almond paste is much more versatile.

The best way to save leftover almond paste is to wrap it tightly (sealed from air and light) and store it in the refrigerator. Just bring the paste back to room temperature

before you use it. *Sebastian Brecht is a pastry chef in New York City.*

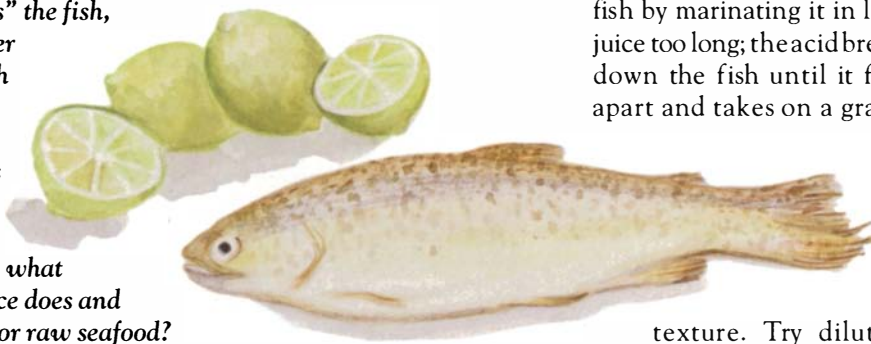
## How lime juice cooks fish

*I love seviche, the Spanish dish of raw fish marinated in lime juice. I know the juice "cooks" the fish, but I wonder whether fish that isn't treated with heat is healthy or not. Could you explain what the lime juice does and doesn't do for raw seafood?*

—David Connor, Westport, CT

**Douglas Rodriguez replies:** The citric acid in lime, lemon, and orange juice actually

helps destroy microorganisms that might be found in fish. While heat physically destroys the organisms, citric acid lowers the pH level of the fish, which creates an environment that most microorganisms can't tolerate. The citric acid also "cooks"



the fish by making its natural proteins coagulate, much as heat does. Thus, fish untouched by heat takes on a texture similar to cooked fish.


It's important to always use the very freshest fish for se-viche: putting lime juice on a questionable piece of fish won't make it edible.

While citric acid is se-viche's magic ingredient, too much is definitely not a good thing. You can "overcook" fish by marinating it in lime juice too long; the acid breaks down the fish until it falls apart and takes on a grainy

texture. Try diluting lime juice with less acidic juices, such as orange, grapefruit, or even passionfruit.


*Douglas Rodriguez is the chef/owner of Patria in New York City.* ♦

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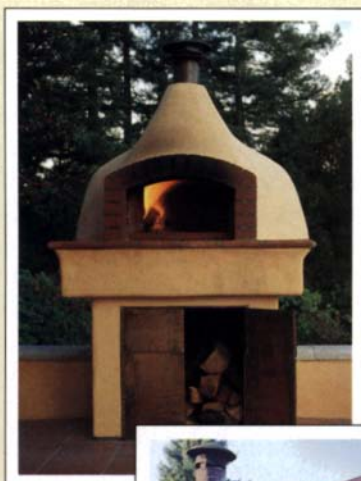


Chefs from left to right: Nancy Silverton of La Brea Bakery in L.A.; Mark Peel of Campanile in L.A.; Nobu Matsuhisa of Matsuhisa in L.A. and Nobu in Manhattan; Larry Forgione of An American Place in Manhattan; and Bradley Ogden of Lark Creek Inn and One Market in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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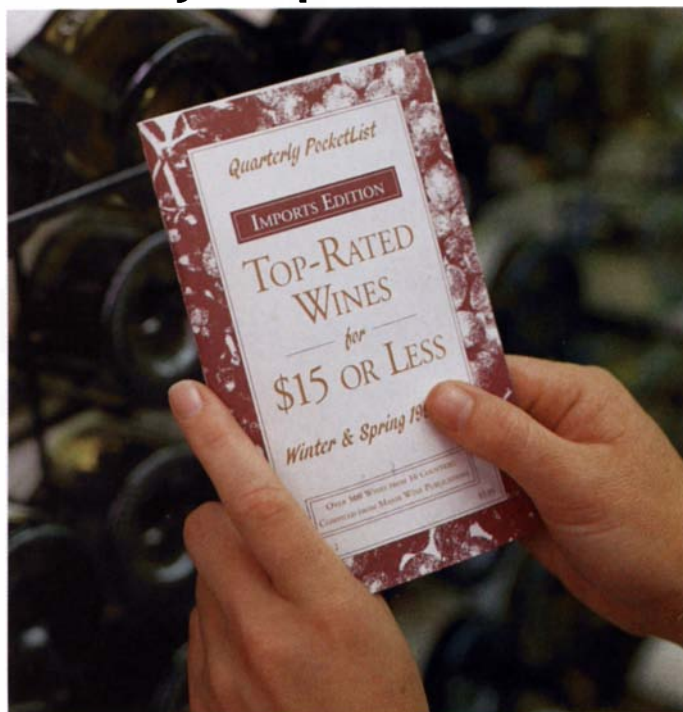
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## Pocket-sized guide to wines that fit your pocketbook



The Quarterly PocketList showcases more than 500 highly rated wines under \$15.

I love to buy wine because I love to drink wine. But even though I know a lot about wine, shopping for it can still be mystifying, frustrating, and ultimately wallet draining.

That's why I really like *The Quarterly PocketList*, a guide to hundreds of great wines that cost \$15 and under. The *PocketList's* editor, John Vankat—a botany professor with a love for wine and an eye for value—surveys the major national wine publications to find wines that are both inexpensive and well regarded.

To earn a place in his guide, a wine must receive a cumulative score of 88 out of 100 or better (86 or 87 if they're widely sold), a numerical rating used by the wine industry. Based on these ratings and his own tastings, the wines receive a letter grade; only those that receive a B+

or better go into the guide. Each issue rates more than 500 wines, all drinkable now. The ratings are presented in a straightforward, easy-to-read format.

**The *PocketList's* issues alternate between domestic and imported wines.** In the international issues, the wines are arranged geographically, including such lesser-known areas as Argentina, South Africa, and southern France, as well as the expected Bordeaux, Chianti, and Australia. In the American issues, the wines are categorized by varietal, the dominant grape used to make the wine.

In the American issue I reviewed, I was pleasantly

surprised to find many lesser-known varietals from smaller producers, such as the wonderful Navarro Gewürtztraminer from Mendocino, the Havens Syrah from Carneros, and the delectably sweet Elysium Black Muscat by Quady. Though these are all worth a special search, the *PocketList* conveniently highlights those wines with a wide distribution, which really helps when you're trying to buy a bottle in the middle of nowhere.

A subscription to the guide is \$21.95 per year (four issues). Call 800/524-1005, or write to Grapevine Associates, PO Box 6003, Oxford, OH 45056.

*Rosina Tinari Wilson, a food and wine writer based in the San Francisco area, is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking.*

## Relishing raw oysters

This is a great time of year to enjoy oysters, when they're plump and tasty, but it isn't always easy to find a reliable source for them. For safe and delicious oysters, I recommend Fishers Island Oysters, which are farmed off the coast of Connecticut and are now available for retail purchase.

I serve Fishers Island *petites* at Oceana, my restaurant in New York City. These oysters have a clean, refreshing saltiness that awakens your taste buds. At first you get a full, briny flavor, followed by a perceived sweetness. (I say *perceived* because it isn't really there; the oyster briefly seems sweet because you're letting go of the saltiness.) Then you experience a fresh, clean, sea-

breeze taste, and finally a nutty finish reminiscent of toasted pumpkin seeds.

I only serve Fishers Island *petites* raw on the half shell because their complex flavor would not stand up well to cooking. Heat would only concentrate the saltiness, and these oysters don't have enough fat content to remain tender and delicious when cooked. At the restaurant, I garnish them with osetra caviar and smoked salmon, or with curry cream and salmon roe. I also offer them as a "shooter" with pepper vodka and a spicy cocktail sauce. But I prefer eating these oysters in their natural state, with perhaps a squeeze of lemon.

**Careful harvesting means safe oysters.** Fishers Island Oysters are farmed in nets and suspended in the ocean water, from the moment they're fertilized until they're harvested 18 to 36 months later. The extremely labor-intensive process produces an oyster with a deep cup and a clean, delicate shell.

All harvesting is done by hand, including tests that assure the quality and safety of



Experience the fresh taste of the sea with Fishers Island Oysters, which are now in the retail market.



each oyster. Aside from flavor, safety is one of the reasons I buy Fishers Island Oysters. After harvest, the oysters are packed and shipped directly to the customer. They arrive at my restaurant chill-packed, fresh, and alive, each delicate shell intact.

You can buy Fishers Island Oysters at Balducci's in New York City at 424 Sixth Avenue, or you can order them through Balducci's catalog (800/225-3822) for \$8.99 per dozen. (They can be shipped overnight.) For more information on Fishers Island Oysters, call 516/788-7889.

Rick Moonen is the executive chef at New York City's Oceana, where an oyster bar was recently added to the restaurant.

## Handy tool quickly mops up grease

As a health-conscious cook with an even more health-minded husband, I take great care to skim off as much fat as possible from cooked dishes like soups and stews. When time permits, I usually let the dish stand overnight in the refrigerator to let the fats congeal. The next day I lift the film of fat from my dish. When my schedule doesn't allow this, I reach for the Authentic Magic Mop, a clever grease-absorbent gadget distributed by the Norpro Company of Everett, Washington.



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The mop resembles a small feather duster, with soft, thin fibers instead of feathers. The special fibers attract grease and repel water. A plastic ring slides over the top of the fibers to hold them in place.

To remove the fat, set the

mop atop the food in its pot or pan and allow the fibers to soak up the unwanted grease. Rinse the mop under hot water and repeat if necessary.

When finished, clean the mop carefully so that no trace of fat remains in the fibers. To clean, simply slide the plastic ring up to loosen the fibers and put the mop in the dishwasher or thoroughly wash by hand with hot water and detergent.

Magic Mops are sold in cookware and gourmet shops nationwide for about \$5.95. For the store nearest you, call 206/261-1000.

Kitty Morse is the author of *The California Farm Cookbook* (Pelican, 1994) and *365 Ways to Cook Vegetarian* (Harper Collins, 1994). ♦

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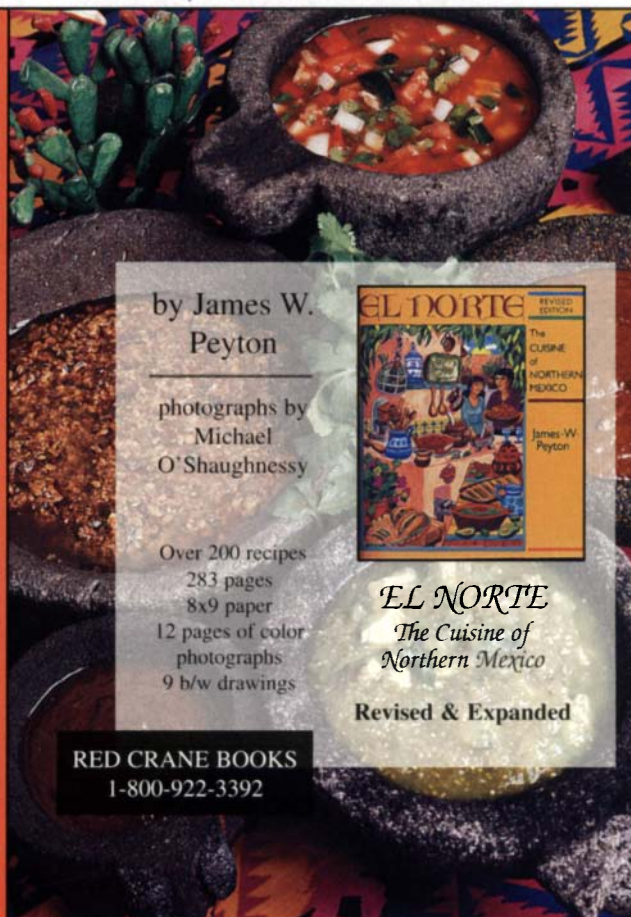
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— Mark Miller  
Author of  
*Coyote Cafe Cookbook*





# Try Stir-Frying for Fast Food

High heat and ready ingredients equal a quick, delicious way to cook

BY DIANE ROSSEN WORTHINGTON

**W**hen I want to prepare a meal that's quick yet packed with lots of flavor, I almost always opt for a stir-fry. A typical stir-fry consists of meat or vegetables (or both) cut into small pieces and cooked over intense heat for a short time. The ingredients are often marinated, and the dish usually includes a light sauce. The technique originated as a way to efficiently use fuel, but stir-frying has

endured because it's a quick, easy, and healthful way to prepare food.

Stir-fry dishes are many and varied, and the order of events may change from recipe to recipe. Regardless of the specific dish, the trick is to have all the ingredients prepared in advance and close at hand before you begin to cook.

## A WOK WORKS BEST

You can stir-fry in a large, heavy skillet, but a wok—a large pot with rounded sides—works best.

*More than just stirring. Move the food around vigorously as it cooks.*

## Simple steps to successful stir-frying



**1** *Prepare ingredients before heating the wok. Cut vegetables and meats into small, similar sizes. Marinate the meat and make your sauce.*



**2** *Add the oil when the wok is hot. Swirl the oil around the bottom and sides of the wok and let the oil heat.*



**3** *Stir-fry aromatics, such as ginger and garlic, until just fragrant. Remove them after they've flavored the oil, or leave them in the wok.*



**A good wok should be heavy but not too thick** or it will take too long to heat. Carbon steel, stainless steel, or treated aluminum are all good materials. If you use a traditional round-bottomed wok, you may need to set a metal ring over your burner so the wok won't tip. Alternatively, you can use a flat-bottomed wok, which stands on its own.

A 14-inch-diameter wok is the best size for home use. A larger wok can be unwieldy and may not fit on the burner; a smaller one may crowd the food and cause it to cook unevenly. A cover is handy for braising or steaming.

**A wide spatula is useful for pushing and lifting food.** The spatula should have a long handle to put some distance between you and the heat. One that's rounded to fit the wok's contours is ideal.

#### **PREPARE ALL YOUR INGREDIENTS IN ADVANCE**

Cut meat, poultry, or tofu into strips or chunks and vegetables into a slice or dice. Cutting cylindrical vegetables like

carrots on the diagonal not only looks good but also creates more surface area for quick, thorough cooking. The pieces should look attractive because in stir-fry, what you see is what you get.

**Marinate meat and fish to add taste and texture.** Typical ingredients in Chinese marinades are toasted sesame oil, soy sauce, sherry, and cornstarch. Cornstarch binds the marinade to the meat, keeping it moist; it also coats the food, giving it texture. Cornstarch thickens stir-fry sauces, too.

**Sauce added at the end binds the ingredients.** Chinese stir-fry sauces may have ingredients similar to those used in marinades, as well as other flavorings such as rice-wine vinegar, hoisin sauce, and stock. If there's no cornstarch already in the stir-fry, you may want to dissolve some in the sauce to thicken it.

#### **HEAT THE WOK AND ADD INGREDIENTS IN ORDER**

Before you add anything to it, heat up your wok. To tell when it's ready, I look for a rainbow-

like shimmer to appear on my wok, but you can also toss a drop of water into the wok; if the heat is high enough, the water will sizzle audibly and evaporate quickly.

**Once the wok is hot, add the oil.** Use an oil that has a high smoking point, meaning that it stands up to high heat. I often use peanut oil because I like its flavor, but safflower and corn oil work, too. Wait until the oil is hot enough to cause a sizzle when the food is added before you begin stir-frying.

You don't need a lot of oil to stir-fry; a tablespoon or two coats the bottom and sides of the wok sufficiently. Add more oil as needed, but be sure it's hot before you continue.

**Aromatics, such as garlic and ginger, add flavor to the wok and the oil.** You can cook the aromatics before the meat or before the vegetables, depending on the recipe and your preference. Stir aromatics quickly to make sure they don't stick and burn. If they're in danger of burning, remove them from the wok before adding the next ingredient.

**Add the meat, if using, and remove it when it's just a bit underdone;** it will finish cooking from its own heat after it's removed from the wok.

**Add the vegetables in order of their cooking times.** If the wok becomes crowded, cook vegetables in batches. Dense vegetables, such as broccoli and cauliflower, may need to be steamed separately to cook through. Add a bit of water to the wok, cover, and steam until just tender.

Return all the elements to the wok. Add the sauce and cook until it thickens slightly. Quickly put the food in a bowl and serve with rice or noodles.

**Stir-frying isn't limited to Chinese dishes.** I use the same technique to make pasta primavera, cooking the vegetables until crisp-tender and tossing them with pasta and sauce. I also make fajitas in the wok with strips of chicken or beef, peppers, and onions.

---

*Diane Rossen Worthington has written eight cookbooks, including Stir-Fry (Time-Life Books, 1994).* ♦



**4** Add the meat and let it sit for a few seconds to brown before stirring. Don't crowd the pan. Cook until barely done and then transfer to a bowl.




**5** Cook the vegetables until crisp-tender. For dense vegetables, add a bit of liquid to the wok, cover, and steam.



**6** Return the meat to the wok and add the sauce. Quickly toss the meat and vegetables with the sauce to cover evenly. Serve right away.





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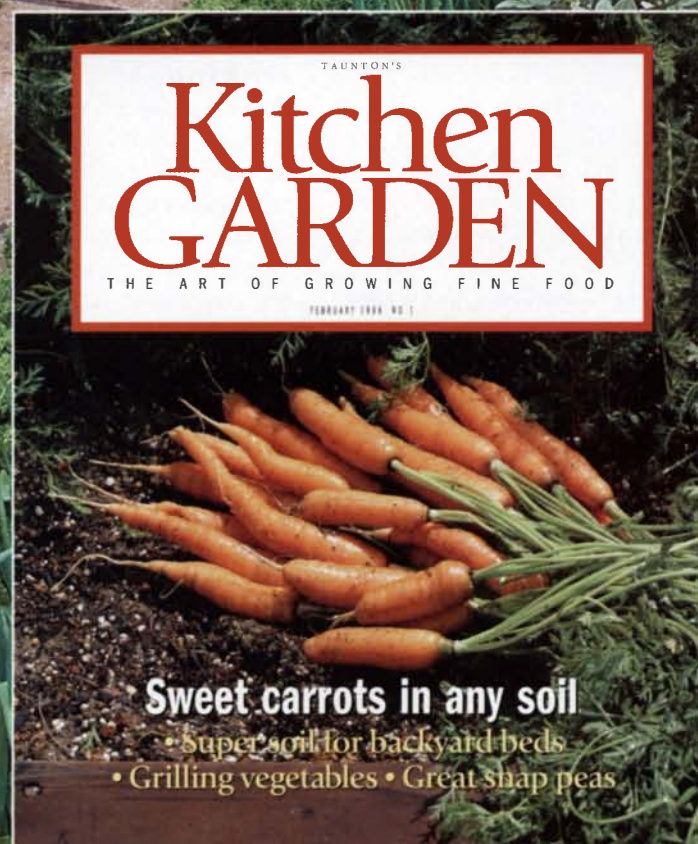
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*Muffin tins steady stuffed tomatoes.*

### **Muffin tins for stuffed tomatoes**

An easy way to bake stuffed tomatoes is to set them in a muffin tin. The tin holds them upright while they bake.

—Joyce Evelyn Yates,  
Moss Point, MS

### **Mayonnaise keeps grilled fish from sticking**

Brush a teaspoon of mayonnaise on each side of a fish fillet before grilling; it keeps the fish moist and prevents it from sticking to the grill. Also, although you can't see or taste the mayonnaise after grilling, if you add herbs to the mayonnaise, they'll flavor the fish.

—June Cerrito,  
Wakefield, RI

### **Potatoes temper turnips**

To temper the taste of mashed turnips, include one potato for every three turnips.

—Tammy Hines-Dumitru,  
Norwalk, CT

### **A spray dries food for better searing**

When searing fish or poultry, it's important to dry it thoroughly before putting it in the

hot pan. A light dusting of Wondra, a flour and lecithin spray used in baking, will absorb moisture and keep the flesh dry.

—David Auerbach,  
Durham, NC

### **For an attractive, flavorful duck, prick the skin**

For a more attractive, aromatic, and flavorful duck, use a four-pronged fork to gently puncture the skin in rows, leaving an inch or two between each puncture. The punctures allow the duck to release juices and fat, which caramelize and coat the skin. Puncturing the skin also prevents the internal juices from building up and pushing out forcefully, which would create skin blisters. Instead, the skin is left flat and crisp.

—Walter J. Morrison III,  
Buffalo, NY

### **Flat-freezing vegetables without sticking**

When you flat-freeze vegetables, you want to keep the produce from sticking to the pan or baking sheet. Line a jelly roll pan or baking sheet with a linen dishtowel and spread out the produce on the towel in one layer. Freeze the produce until hard and then transfer to storage bags. The towel absorbs any excess water and prevents your fruits or vegetables from sticking to the pan.

—Susan Asanovic,  
Wilton, CT

### **Vinegar removes dirt from vegetables**

To remove excess dirt from home-grown vegetables, add about ¼ cup of vinegar to a

basin of cold water. Submerge the vegetables in the water and soak for several minutes. Slosh vigorously, rinse well, and drain. The vinegar cuts through and loosens the dirt without affecting flavor.

—Russ Shumaker,  
Richmond, VA

### **Preventing waste in your food processor**

After using the food processor for sticky things like purées, the blade is left with a lot of food on it. To prevent this mess and waste, remove the contents from the processor bowl, replace the blade, and pulse the empty processor for a few seconds with an empty bowl. You'll get clean blades and whatever was left on the blades will be on the bowl, which you can easily scrape out with your spatula.

—Rose Marie Olachea,  
Lima, Peru

### **Cutting a chile without seeds and stems**

In your July issue, Bob Sargent discusses how to prepare chile peppers (*Fine Cooking* #9, Basics, p. 77). I agree with his method, but I find that by slicing off the ends of



*Hold chiles upright to easily cut away the flesh.*

the chile and holding it upright on the cutting board, you can slice downward from

Do you have a clever way to peel vegetables, line a cake pan, or keep herbs tasting fresh? Write to Tips, *Fine*

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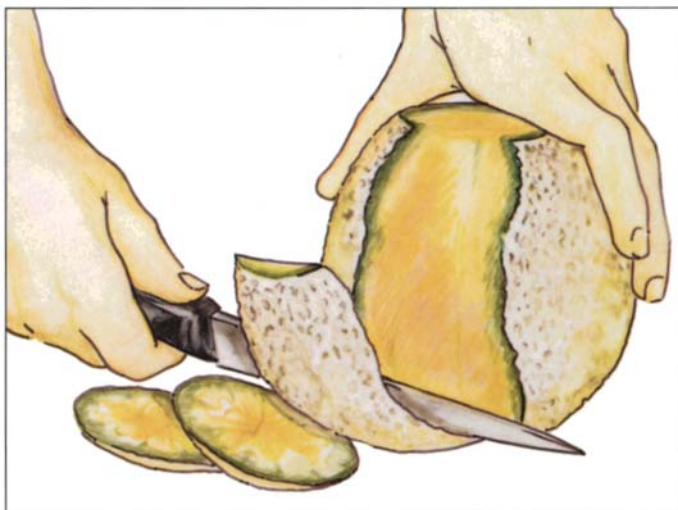
stem to tip. This allows you to cut away just the flesh and leave the veins and seeds attached to the central core. This not only saves time, but it also reduces the possibility of the chile's innards finding their way onto your skin or into your dish.

—Clyde Serda,  
Alameda, CA

### Vodka keeps ginger fresh

To keep ginger fresh for months, I put it in a glass jar and fill it with vodka. You don't need to refrigerate it, the smell is wonderful, and the ginger takes on just a hint of the vodka's flavor.

—Sheryl Hur-House,  
Jupiter, FL



A quick way to peel a cantaloupe before you slice it.

### The best way to cut a cantaloupe

To quickly remove the skin from cantaloupes or other round melons, first cut off the

ends of the melon so you can work with a flat surface. Hold the top with one hand and carefully slice off the skin in sections from top to bottom.

Turn the melon as you go. Once the melon is skinned, cut it in half and remove the seeds. This method makes it easier to cut even sections of fruit.

—Nancy Hoffman,  
San Rafael, CA

### Skin hazelnuts with baking soda and boiling water

Here's an easy and thorough method for skinning hazelnuts before you toast them. Add 3 tablespoons of baking soda to 2 cups boiling water; add the nuts and blanch for 3 to 4 minutes. The baking soda neutralizes their acidic skins, which slide right off the nuts. The nuts can be dried and toasted in the oven as usual.

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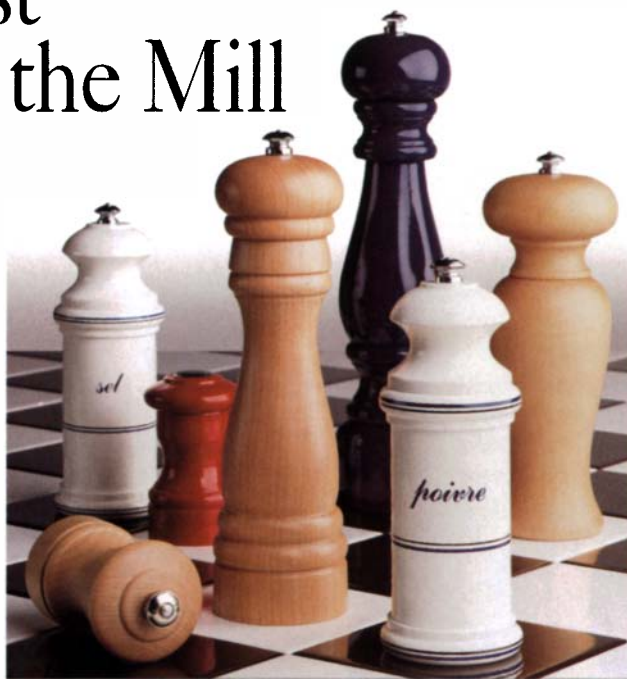
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## TIPS

To test the nuts, run one under cold water. If it releases its skin, the nuts are ready.

—Jennifer B. Foster,  
Huntersville, NC

### Bottled water for better baking

When I bake, I use bottled spring water (most supermarkets sell it in gallon jugs). Using bottled water eliminates inconsistencies in mineral content or off flavors that can affect tap water.

—Margaret Kasten,  
Boston, MA

### Making yogurt in an ice chest

When I make yogurt, I use this method for achieving the correct, constant temperature. Lay a clean bath towel in the bottom of a plastic thermal ice chest and pour in just

enough boiling water to saturate the towel. Pour the warm cultured milk into sterilized glass jars and set the jars on the towel. The filled jars will settle into the towel, but the jars shouldn't be standing in hot water. Put the lid on the chest and, in four hours, you'll have a thick yogurt that's ready to be refrigerated.

—Mary Steele Lawler,  
Benoit, MS

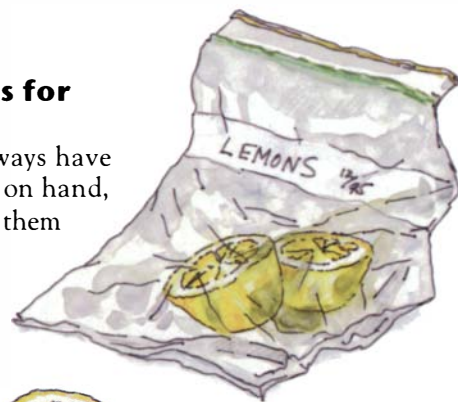
### Freeze cabbages before stuffing

When making stuffed cabbage, freeze the whole head of cabbage a day or so before using it. When the cabbage thaws, the leaves are soft. This is much easier than par-boiling each leaf.

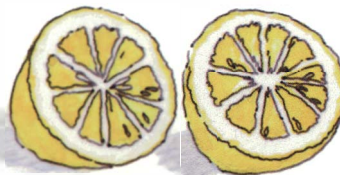
—Toni Cherry,  
San Miguel De Allende,  
Mexico

### Freeze lemons for fresh juice

To ensure you always have fresh lemon juice on hand, halve lemons, put them in a plastic bag, and freeze them.



Freezing lemon halves ensures a supply of fresh juice.



Allow the lemon to defrost overnight before you squeeze it. Not only does this method prevent you from wasting lemon halves, but the process of freezing and thawing also seems to make the lemons very juicy.

—Nancy P. Dowd,  
Lunenburg, Nova Scotia

### Keep a pastry brush for the spice grinder

I love to cook with freshly ground spices, but I always find that some spices get left behind in the grinder. To get out every last bit of bit, I use a 2-inch pastry brush reserved just for this purpose. Now I can get a clean sweep.

—John Cecil,  
Austin, TX ♦

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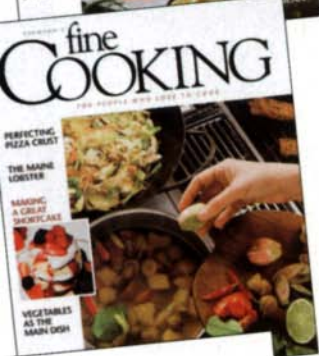
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# Chicken Pot Pie Warms a Chilly Night

Roast the chicken and vegetables for bigger flavors in the filling

BY CATHIE GUNTLI



*Chicken-pot-pie filling needs only one pan. Roasting the chicken and vegetables in the same flameproof pan ensures that every bit of flavor makes it to the filling.*

As you break through the lid of a chicken pot pie, the golden pastry crackles and then releases fragrant, mouthwatering steam. As your fork dives deeper, you find a wealth of roasted chicken and vegetables, bound in a rich, amber sauce seasoned with thyme and rosemary. Bring just one bite to your mouth, and you can't stop eating until the last crumb of flaky pastry has mopped up every bit of sauce.

I can think of few dishes that offer this kind of sensory satisfaction, which is why chicken pot pie is on my menu every night.

## DELICIOUS CHICKEN POT PIE, EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

For me, the key to making a great chicken pot pie is to make each element in the dish taste good enough to eat on its own. That's why I roast the ingredients rather than boil them, as most recipes call for. Roasting brings a deep, full flavor to the chicken, and the method caramelizes the vegetables to coax out their sweetness. I roast the chicken and vegetables in the same pan, and their delicious pan juices become part of the sauce.

I top my pie with a pastry that makes a flaky, buttery crust but is no more difficult to make than a basic pie dough. I call it "rough puff pastry" because it's a simplified version of traditional puff pastry, but it's also a dough that looks disconcertingly rough until you've rolled it out a couple of times.

## ONE PAN MAKES A POT-PIE FILLING OF MANY FLAVORS

Roasting the chicken and vegetables in the same flameproof pan ensures that every bit of flavor makes it to the filling. Because you use the same pan (with all its delicious juices) to make the sauce on the stove, chicken pot pie is virtually a one-pan meal.

Make sure your pan is heavy, so nothing burns during roasting or saucemaking. Choose a size that fits the chicken and vegetables comfortably, with enough room to stir the vegetables once or twice during roasting.

You don't need to truss the chicken since you're going to pull the meat from the bones, and so the final shape of the roasted chicken is irrelevant. Do try to get a nice, naturally processed bird, and remove any visible fat from the cavity. I roast the bird upside down, which means the delicate breast meat is both protected from the drying heat of the oven and basted by the juices that drip into the pan.

You can use almost any vegetable you like in the recipe. I'm suggesting the classic mix of potatoes, onions, carrots, mushrooms, and peas. I also like winter vegetables, such as parsnips, turnips, leeks, and sweet potatoes, because they hold their shape well and they're delicious roasted.

If you want to make a vegetable pot pie, substitute about four cups of chopped vegetables for the chicken and roast as directed for about 45 minutes. You can use vegetable stock instead of chicken stock for the sauce, too.

## PASTRY WITH ALL OF THE PUFF AND LESS OF THE WORK

Rough puff pastry uses a technique called "turning" (see the photos on p. 27). Every time you fold over, or "turn," the dough, you're creating a layer that will puff up in the oven.

One of the keys to success with this kind of dough is keeping all your ingredients cold—even the flour. When a dough gets warm, the butter melts, which

*The seductive power of comfort food. This home-cooking favorite is irresistible when you treat each element as if it had to taste good enough to eat on its own.*





means the layers won't separate during baking. You'll get tough, greasy pastry.

Ideally, your hands (which are warm) should never touch the dough as you're shaping and turning it. I use a plastic pastry scraper to fold the dough over or to scoot dough back in line.

**"Are you sure this is right?"**

That's what people always ask me when I show them how to make rough puff pastry. It's hard to believe the dry, crumbly mess on the counter will ever turn into manageable dough. I quickly let them know they're doing fine; it's supposed to look strange at first.

You start by chopping butter and flour together on a large cutting board. Next you use a spatula to mix in just a little cold water, and then you begin to coax this shaggy substance into shape, using a rolling pin. That's when skepticism turns to admiration—the mess becomes a smooth, easy-to-handle dough.

#### CHICKEN POT PIE OF ANY SIZE, ANY TIME

Once you've made the filling and the dough, you can assemble and bake the pies immediately or refrigerate the ingredients for another day. I think the filling tastes even better after a day in the refrigerator. If you really want to get a jump on things, make the pastry a few weeks ahead—it freezes beautifully.



*The roasting pan becomes a saucepan. When you use a flameproof pan to roast the chicken and vegetables, you can put the pan directly on the stove and use the drippings to make the sauce.*

**Rough puff pastry looks like a dry, crumbly mess at first, but it turns into a smooth dough.**

Your pot pie can be any size you like, but be sure the dishes you use are ovenproof. To cut out a pot-pie top to fit your dish, just turn the dish onto the dough and use it as template. I like to cut the tops a little larger and press the extra crust along the outside of the dish; no one complains about having too much flaky crust on a chicken pot pie.

The final step is an assembly-line construction of the pies. Portion the filling and sauce into the dish, top with the pastry, crimp the edges, brush with egg wash (to brown the pastry), and bake. The filling almost always bubbles over a little as the pie bakes, so I put the pies in the oven on a baking sheet.

While no one's found a way to keep people from opening the oven to peek at what smells so good, try telling them they'll get a puffer pie if they keep the door closed.

#### Chicken Pot Pie

A flameproof roasting pan is key to this recipe. The chicken and vegetables are cooked in the same pan, which you'll also use to make a flavorful sauce. *Yields six 12-ounce pies, or one 2-quart pie.*

**One 3-lb. chicken**  
**3 Tbs. olive oil**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**2 cups ½-inch potato chunks (1 to 2 medium peeled potatoes; I prefer Yukon gold)**  
**24 pearl onions, peeled and left whole**  
**2 cups ½-inch carrot chunks (2 to 3 medium carrots, peeled)**  
**1 clove garlic, peeled and minced**  
**8 mushrooms, halved or quartered**  
**2 Tbs. chopped assorted fresh herbs (parsley, rosemary, thyme); more to taste**  
**1 cup peas (fresh or frozen and defrosted)**

#### FOR THE SAUCE:

**4 cups chicken stock (homemade or low-salt canned)**  
**6 Tbs. butter (as needed)**  
**6 Tbs. flour**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

#### FOR THE PASTRY:

**1 recipe Rough Puff Pastry (opposite), refrigerated**

#### FOR THE EGG WASH:

**1 egg yolk, beaten**  
**½ cup cream**

**To roast the chicken and vegetables**—Heat the oven to 375°F. Rub the chicken with 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and sprinkle generously, inside and out, with salt and pepper.

Toss the potatoes, onions, carrots, garlic, and mushrooms with the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil and the chopped herbs.

Set the chicken upside down in a large flameproof roasting pan and scatter the vegetables around the chicken. Roast for 1 hour and 15 min., stirring the vegetables several times.





*This pile of crumbs turns into a smooth dough. Roll the dough into a 6x18-inch rectangle.*



*A flat, plastic scraper is invaluable. Use this tool to fold the two short sides of the rectangle to the center.*

Remove the chicken from the pan to cool. Remove the vegetables with a slotted spoon and reserve them in a bowl, with the peas. Don't rinse out the roasting pan.

**To make the sauce**—Pour the fat and juices into a measuring cup or gravy separator. Spoon or pour the fat away from the juice; reserve the fat. Add the juices to the chicken stock. Measure out the fat and add enough butter (if needed) to make 6 Tbs.

Put the roasting pan (which should still have the caramelized bits from the chicken and vegetables) on the stove over medium heat. Pour in the 6 Tbs. of fat and butter mixture; when it's melted and bubbling, add the flour and stir constantly to make a smooth roux. Scrape up any caramelized remains from the chicken and vegetables. Cook the roux, stirring constantly, until lightly browned, about 5 min. Add the chicken stock, bring to a boil, and simmer. Continue to stir and scrape the bottom of the pan. Cook the sauce for at least 15 min., whisking occasionally, until it's as thick as heavy cream. Season with salt, pepper, and more herbs to taste.

When the chicken has cooled, pull the meat from the bones, discarding the skin and bones. Cut the meat into small (½- to 1-inch ) chunks and set aside.

**To assemble the pot pies:** Heat the oven to 400°F. Choose four 12-oz. ovenproof bowls or a 2-qt. casserole.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator. Lay it on a floured board and roll it out ⅛ inch thick into a 20x16-inch rectangle. Set the dish for the pot pie upside down on the dough and cut around the rim with a knife or pastry cutter. (If you like extra pastry, cut the pastry a little larger than the top of the dish.) Stack the pastry pieces on a plate, separating each with waxed paper or plastic wrap. Refrigerate until ready to use.

Divide the chicken, vegetables, and sauce among the dishes. Lay the pastry on top, pressing along the edge of the dish to seal.



*Complete the "turn." Fold the bottom end to the top, as if you were closing a wallet.*

**To make the egg wash**—Blend the egg yolk and cream. Brush the mixture onto the pastry with a pastry brush.

Put the pies on a baking sheet to catch any drips. Bake on the center rack in the 400°F oven for 50 to 55 min., or until the crust is thoroughly browned and puffed. Steam will escape along the edges of the pastry.

## Rough Puff Pastry

Don't use a food processor to chop the butter and flour; it warms the butter and makes the pieces too small. Flour amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups). Use either measurement. *Yields 1½ pounds pastry.*

*¾ lb. (3 sticks) cold, unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch pieces*  
*13½ oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour, chilled; more for dusting the work surface*  
*1 tsp. salt*  
*⅔ cup chilled water*

Put the butter pieces on a large work surface and chop them roughly with a knife. Dump the chilled flour and the salt on top of the butter and use a large knife or a pastry blender to cut the butter and flour together. When well combined (the mixture still will be very dry and rough), add the water, a small amount at a time, and mix with a knife or large spatula or a pastry scraper. You'll





*No cookie cutters necessary. Turn the dish onto the dough and use it as a template. The author cuts her dough a little larger and presses the extra pastry along the outside of the dish.*



*An individual pot pie is irresistible. It means every bite is yours to savor.*

have a very crude, dry-looking mixture, but don't worry: it all comes together.

Scrape the dough aside to dust your work surface with flour and then begin rolling out the crumbly dough into a 6x18-inch rectangle. Use a flat, plastic scraper (or the spatula's edge) to fold the two short sides of the rectangle to the center; then fold the bottom end to the top, as if you were closing a wallet. You now have a rectangle that's roughly 4½x6 inches.

Turn the dough 90° clockwise so that the seam is on the right side. Roll it out again to form a 6x18-inch rectangle. You may need to continue lightly dusting the dough and the work surface with flour to keep the rolling pin from sticking to the dough. Repeat the folding process (you'll have a small rectangle again), seal the dough in plastic wrap, and refrigerate it for at least 15 min.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and roll it out to a 6x18-inch rectangle. Repeat the fold-and-roll process twice more. The dough should be smooth. Seal the dough in plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 2 hours.

*Cathie Guntli is the chef/owner of the Liberty Café in San Francisco, where she'll never take chicken pot pie off the menu. ♦*



## Wine Choices

### Simple wines for comfort food

Look for a white wine that's rather substantial to match the dish's overall body. A slightly herbal Sauvignon Blanc, such as Kenwood or Caymus, will bring out the herbs in the pot pie while adding a clean, refreshing finish. A fairly rich Chardonnay, such as Wente Bros. or Fetzer Barrel Select, will pick up on the buttery, toasty pastry crust.

As for reds, you don't need anything pricey—just make it dry, with a light to medium body. An inexpensive Pinot Noir such as Meridian or Kendall-Jackson, a light Rhone-style wine like Bonny Doon's Clos de Gilroy, an Italian Valpolicella (try Bolla or Masi) or a Spanish Rioja (Bodegas Montecillo or Marqués de Cáceres) would work nicely. And speaking of Spain, a good dry sherry (oloroso, fino, or amontillado) would bring lovely nutty, caramelized flavors to the pairing.

—*Rosina Tinari Wilson, a food and wine writer and teacher in the San Francisco area, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.*



# Fresh, Briny-Sweet Mussels

Steaming is the first step to unlocking the flavor of these easy-to-cook shellfish

BY MOLLY STEVENS

I remember the night I fell in love with mussels. It was cold and damp on the Atlantic shore. A group of friends and I shared an enormous bowl of steamed mussels, fragrant with wine and herbs, and plenty of crusty bread to sop up the garlicky, briny juices. We ate dozens of these tender, sweet shellfish and washed them down with glasses of icy, bone-dry white wine. After a while, cold and damp turned to contentment. Oysters may be unctuous, and clams may have cachet, but that night, mussels won me over.

And lucky for me, mussels are cheap, easy to find, not hard to prepare, and adapt to lots of different cooking methods: steamed and simple, like that night at the beach; tossed in pasta sauce or into soup; cooked with rice pilaf or risotto; or stuffed, broiled, and served on the half shell.

## EASY TO FIND, EASY TO FIX

If you compare the price of mussels to other shellfish, you'll see they're a bargain. At my market, I pay \$1 per pound vs. \$8 for oysters or \$12 for shrimp.

Even though you'll find mussels in the market year-round, don't buy them during their spawning season, when their meat is mushy and their shelf life reduced. The ones you see most frequently are Atlantic blue mussels. For them, spawning takes place in summer, so the best seasons are fall, winter, and early spring. You may also start seeing Mediterranean mussels, grown in the Puget sound. The Mediterranean spawns in winter, so its peak seasons are spring, summer, and fall. Large, green-lipped New Zealand mussels are usually only available frozen, so season isn't an issue. They're not my favorites, however, because the meat can be bland and mushy.

**Be sure they're alive when you buy them.** When you're buying fresh mussels, check to see that they're moist, displayed on ice, have a sweet ocean smell, and that they look alive. Don't buy mussels if they're



*These mussels are steamed briefly, then broiled. They're topped with spinach, herbs, and Parmesan cheese (recipe on p. 32).*





*Scrub and rinse the shells to keep grit out of your dish. The shells of cultivated mussels are usually free of barnacles and other debris, so this step doesn't take long.*



*Trim the tough beard before cooking. This rough string anchored the mussel to the underwater surface on which it grew.*

## Mussels can be wild or cultivated

Mussels grow in coastal waters all around the world. In the wild, they're attached in clusters by a tough thread to rocks, gravel, or any underwater surface they can find.

Wild mussels rarely make it to market, but you can recognize them by their thick, rough shells. On a trip to the Magdalen

Islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, we bought wild mussels from fishermen at the dock. Though they were absolutely delicious, each mussel had several small "pearls" inside, and the meats were much smaller than those of cultivated mussels.

When you see mussels in the market labeled cultivated, it can mean one of several things. The price usually gives a clue to how they were raised.

♦ The most expensive and best-quality mussels are called "off-bottom" mussels, which are grown on ropes or posts planted vertically in mussel "farms." The mussels are seeded, monitored, and harvested

carefully. They have thin, shiny shells with large, plump meats.

♦ Mussels are also farmed on sandy ocean bottoms called "mussel parks." These are good-quality mussels, but they tend to be more gritty than off-bottom mussels.

♦ Some mussels labeled as cultivated aren't actually farm-raised. They're harvested from natural sandy bottom beds and then graded, sorted, purged of sand, and rinsed. This is the least expensive category of mussels.

Mussels can accumulate toxins in their bodies from polluted waters, so only buy them from reliable sources.



*A nice haul of rope-grown Mediterranean mussels.*

sitting in a puddle of water. Live mussels will usually have a tightly closed shell, though they'll gape when exposed to warmer temperatures; their shells should close at least partially right away when you tap or jostle them. Mussels are usually graded by size, ranging from two to four inches. I prefer medium to small mussels, as their meats are the sweetest and tenderest.

**Figure your portions by count, not weight.**

Mussel shells are heavy, so it's easier to figure out how much you need by count instead of weight. As a main course, count 12 to 15 medium mussels per person ( $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 pound); for appetizers, about half that amount. Mussels are highly perishable, so always buy a bit more than you'll need because you'll wind up throwing out a few dead ones.

**Keep mussels cold and let them breathe.** Use the mussels the same day that you buy them, if possible, and store them in the coldest part of the refrigerator. I like to take them out of their plastic bag (they need to breathe), dump them in a big bowl, and cover them with a damp towel. If I'm keeping them for more than a few hours, I'll put a sealed bag of ice on the towel to keep the temperature really low. Don't put loose ice cubes on the mussels, however, as they can drown if a lot of melting ice accumulates. Like all shellfish, mussels need oxygen. Sea water has oxygen in it, but tap water doesn't have enough to sustain them.

You may see recipes that call for purging mussels by soaking them in a solution of salted water and cornmeal. You don't need to do this anymore because today's mussels are already soaked and washed (see sidebar at left).

**Sort and clean carefully before cooking.** Preparing mussels for cooking isn't difficult, but you do need to toss out any bad ones and clean the rest to avoid grit in your finished dish.

♦ Discard any open mussels that don't close at least partially when you tap them. Check closed mussels, too. A good test is to hold a mussel between your thumb and forefinger and try to slide the two shells





*Give mussels a tap and a snap to see if they're alive. If alive, open ones will close when tapped, and the shells of closed ones will not easily separate when slid between thumb and finger.*

apart. If the shells slide easily, the mussel is dead. Closed mussels that feel much heavier than the others may be full of sand. Don't take a chance of spoiling the dish—toss them out. Also, get rid of any that have broken or cracked shells.

◆ Remove the byssus, or “beard,” that hangs out of the shell (this is what keeps them attached to the rocks, ropes, or posts on which they grow underwater). Tug and scrape away the threads with a paring knife, scissors, or your hands. Some chefs prefer to cut away the beard, because pulling will tear the inside meat a bit. Removing the beard kills the mussel, so don't do it too far in advance.

◆ Scrub the shells with a small brush to remove any remaining debris. Wild mussels tend to be covered with souvenirs from the sea, but cultivated ones will be fairly clean. Finish by rinsing under cold water.

#### FOR MOST DISHES, START BY STEAMING

Once you get past the shell, mussels are quite delicate and they respond best to steaming. This is also the best way to get them open if you want to use them without the shells, though you can pry open the shells as you would an oyster. You can also put mussels directly under the broiler until they pop open.

**Steaming also gives you a chance to boost their flavor** by using a tart liquid, such as white wine, lemon juice, or vinegar, and adding herbs and seasonings. But don't add salt to the cooking liquid because the mussels themselves are quite salty. After the mussels are cooked, use the strained steaming liquid as a great sauce or add it to the dish in which you're using the mussels.

Pay close attention to the mussels while they're cooking so you don't overcook them, which makes them tough and rubbery. Let larger mussels steam for an extra minute or two.

**Throw out any mussels that don't open after cooking.** Some cooks say the ones that stay closed are the best, but for safety's sake, I don't recommend eating them.

**The best way to enjoy mussels is honest and on their own**—steamed in a flavorful liquid, served in large bowls doused with the steaming liquid, and topped with chopped herbs (see the recipe below). I always have another big bowl or a bucket for the shells, and I use either a fork or an empty shell as pincers to get at the meat.

**Use mussels in soups** or other dishes in which you don't want the shells by steaming them first, just long enough for the shells to open, and then removing the meat. Use a little steaming liquid to keep the meats moist until you're ready to use them, and keep a few of the prettiest mussels in the shell to use as a garnish.

**Mussels are delicious cooked directly on a rice pilaf or risotto.** Add them during the last five minutes of cooking the rice, cover, and steam to open. Be sure the pot is big enough to fit the opened shells.

#### Classic Steamed Mussels in White Wine

*(Moules Marinières)*

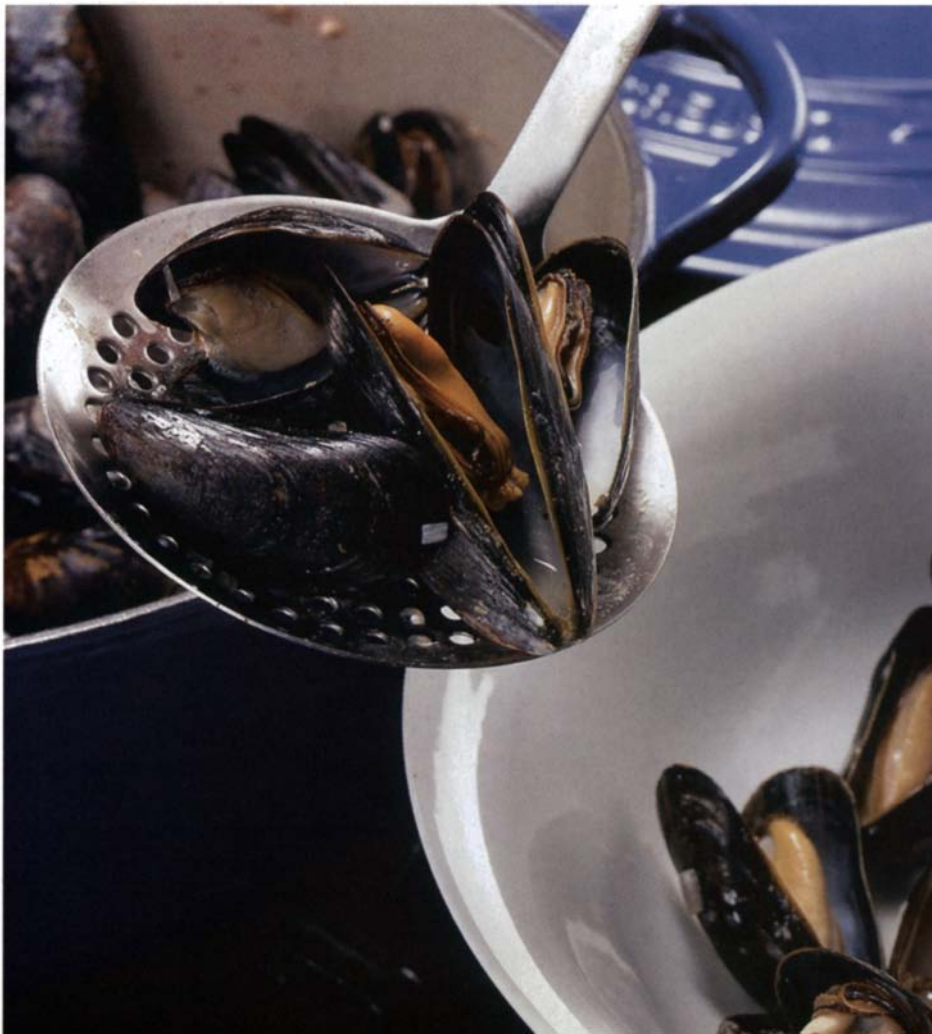
For a variation on this classic version, flavor the cooking liquid with a combination of celery, fennel, bell pepper, basil, or saffron. Serves four as a main course or eight as a first course.

**1 cup dry white wine**

**¼ cup lemon juice or white-wine vinegar (omit if your wine is very acidic)**

*(Ingredient list continues on next page)*

*The mussels that pop open during steaming are ready for eating. Give the stubborn ones a few more minutes of cooking, but if they refuse to open, discard them.*



2 Tbs. finely chopped shallots  
 1 tsp. cracked black pepper  
 4 sprigs parsley  
 1 bay leaf  
 ½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme (omit if fresh isn't available)  
 4 lb. medium mussels, sorted and cleaned  
 4 Tbs. cold butter (optional)  
 ¼ cup chopped parsley

Heat the wine, lemon juice, shallots, pepper, parsley sprigs, bay leaf, and thyme in a pot (with a lid) that's large enough to accommodate the mussels when their shells have opened. Bring to a boil, add the mussels, and cover. Steam until the shells open (5 to 8 min.), shaking the pan once or twice during cooking.

With a slotted spoon, remove the opened mussels from the pot and set aside in a large bowl; keep warm. Steam any closed ones another 1 or 2 min. to see if they'll open. Discard any mussels that remain closed.

Strain the cooking liquid into a bowl through a strainer lined with several layers of cheesecloth. Give the pot a quick rinse and return the strained liquid. Boil for 3 to 4 min. to reduce and concentrate the flavor. Swirl in the cold butter to enrich the sauce, if you like.

Divide the mussels among serving bowls and pour the sauce on top. Sprinkle with chopped parsley and serve with good crusty bread.

### Angel Hair Pasta with Mussels & Spicy Tomato Sauce

Steaming the mussels directly in the pasta sauce streamlines the recipe and means more flavor in the sauce. If you don't have Pernod, add ¼ teaspoon crushed fennel seeds. *Serves four as a main course.*

2 Tbs. olive oil  
 1 medium onion, chopped  
 1 small bulb fennel, chopped  
 2 Tbs. Pernod or other anise-flavored liqueur  
 5 threads saffron, crushed and soaked in 1 Tbs. warm water  
 4 cloves garlic, minced  
 1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme, or ¼ tsp. dried  
 ¾ cup crisp, dry white wine  
 One 28-oz. can whole plum tomatoes with liquid (or 4 large ripe tomatoes, peeled and seeded)

1½ lb. medium mussels, cleaned and sorted  
 ¾ lb. angel hair pasta  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
 ½ cup chopped parsley

Heat the olive oil in a large, deep skillet (with a lid) or a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion and cook for 2 to 3 min. Add the fennel and cook until the onion is translucent, another 8 to 10 min. Increase the heat to high, add the Pernod, saffron, garlic, and thyme. After 1 min., stir in the white wine and boil for 5 min. Add the tomatoes, reduce the heat, and simmer 15 to 20 min., stirring to break up the tomatoes.

Meanwhile, put water on to boil for the pasta. When the tomato sauce has cooked for about 20 min., scatter the mussels over the tomato sauce and cover the pot. Steam until the shells are open, 8 to 10 min. Discard any that won't open. Season the sauce with salt and pepper to taste and keep it warm while you boil the pasta in salted water. Divide the pasta and sauce among four serving bowls and sprinkle with chopped parsley. Serve immediately.

### Mussels Stuffed with Spinach & Parmesan

This savory appetizer will convert anyone still timid about mussels. *Serves four.*

1 cup dry white wine  
 4 Tbs. finely chopped shallots  
 1 tsp. cracked black pepper  
 4 sprigs parsley  
 1 bay leaf  
 ½ tsp. chopped fresh thyme (omit if fresh isn't available)  
 28 medium mussels (about 2 lb.), sorted and cleaned

#### FOR THE STUFFING:

2 Tbs. butter or olive oil  
 2 cups lightly packed, washed, stemmed, and chopped fresh spinach  
 ½ cup heavy cream  
 3 Tbs. chopped parsley  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
 ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese

Combine the wine, 2 Tbs. of the shallots, pepper, parsley sprigs, bay leaf, and thyme in a pot (with a lid) large enough to accommodate the mussels when their shells have opened. Bring to a boil, add the mussels, cover, and steam until just opened, 2 to 3 min. Try not to steam the mussels longer than necessary, because they'll be cooked again later. Remove the mussels with a slotted spoon and set aside. Strain the cooking liquid through a strainer lined with several layers of cheesecloth and reserve.

**For the stuffing**—Heat the butter in a heavy-based pan. Add the remaining shallots and cook until soft, 3 to 4 min. Add the spinach, cover, and cook briefly until the spinach wilts. Uncover and cook until the liquid from the spinach evaporates, another 3 to 4 min. Add ½ cup of the strained mussel liquid and cook until the mixture is almost dry, about 5 min. Add the cream and again cook until the mixture is almost dry, about 10 min. Add the chopped parsley and season to taste with salt and pepper; the mixture should be quite peppery.

*Enjoy your classic steamed mussels with a clever utensil—an empty shell. It has a springy hinge, making it a natural pair of tongs.*







*These mussels were steamed right in the sauce, so none of the flavor was lost. Be sure to make the tomato sauce in a pot large enough to fit all the mussels when their shells are open.*

Heat the broiler. Remove the mussels from their shells. Make a bed of rock salt or crumpled foil on a baking sheet (to steady the shells) and arrange as many half shells as you have mussel meats. Put a mussel meat on each half shell and spoon a teaspoonful of the spinach mixture over each. Top with the grated cheese and broil until golden and bubbly, 4 to 6 min. Serve with small forks and bread to soak up the rich juices.

## Thai Mussel Soup

This soup is a good antidote to raw February weather. Try to find the fish sauce, which gives the soup more complexity; if you omit it, you may need to add salt. Serves four to six.

2 cups dry white wine  
2 Tbs. lemon juice  
1 small onion, chopped  
1 rib celery, chopped  
1 bay leaf  
3 Tbs. chopped garlic  
8 cilantro stems  
2 lb. medium mussels, sorted and cleaned  
4 oz. rice vermicelli noodles  
2 Tbs. oil  
2 small fresh serrano chiles, lightly crushed



1 Tbs. grated lime zest  
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger  
2 cups chopped bok choy  
8 scallions, sliced thin, white and green parts separated  
2 cups clam juice  
1 cup water  
2 Tbs. lime juice  
2 Tbs. fish sauce (optional)  
1 Tbs. soy sauce  
1 tsp. sugar  
2 Tbs. chopped cilantro

In a large pot with a lid, combine the wine, lemon juice, onion, celery, bay leaf, 2 Tbs. of the garlic, and cilantro stems. Bring to a boil, add the mussels, cover the pot, and steam the mussels just until they open, 3 to 4 min. (Don't overcook them; they get a second cooking later.) Remove the mussels with a slotted spoon and let cool. Strain the cooking liquid through a strainer lined with several layers of cheesecloth. You should have about 3 cups broth.

Break up the rice noodles in a deep bowl (to keep them from scattering), cover with hot water, and soak to soften, 10 to 15 min.

In a large, heavy-based soup pot, heat the oil. Add the crushed chiles, lime zest, remaining garlic, and ginger. Sauté until tender, about 1 to 2 min; don't let the ingredients brown. Add the bok choy and the white parts of the scallions and cook for another 3 to 4 min., stirring occasionally. Add the clam juice, water, lime juice, fish sauce, soy sauce, sugar, and strained mussel broth. Bring to a simmer.

While the soup is heating, remove the mussels from their shells (reserve any juices, strain, and add the liquid to the soup). Strain the soaked noodles and add them to the soup; add the mussels. Simmer for another 2 to 3 min. Garnish each serving with fresh cilantro and the scallion greens.

Molly Stevens is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont. In 1991, she opened a retail seafood market in Burlington, Vermont. She is a contributing editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

*The fragrant mussel steaming liquid becomes the base of this Thai soup. The mussel meats are removed from their shells before being added to the soup for an easy-to-eat presentation.*

# The Salad in Winter

Some vegetables and greens are at their best when the mercury drops

BY ODESSA PIPER

**M**y restaurant's main source of ingredients is a twice-weekly local farmer's market, so I cook with the seasons. I know I've really seen the last of the tomatoes and basil once the cool weather hits, but that doesn't mean I give up on preparing fresh, seasonal salads. Although the winters in Madison, Wisconsin, are long ones, I've found there's no contradiction in the phrase "delicious winter salads."

Even the depths of winter offer inspirational produce: some greens and vegetables are better in the winter than any other time of year. It's easy to choose and prepare vegetables for winter salads, especially when you use ingredients and flavors that are at their peak when the mercury drops.



*Roasted sweet potatoes brighten a warm spinach salad. Dice the potatoes small to ensure they'll roast quickly and evenly.*

*Author Odessa Piper at her favorite grocery store. She buys nearly all of her restaurant's produce from her local farmers' market and brings it back to L'Etoile in a four-wheeled red wagon.*

Photos: Boyd Hagen



## WHY SOME SALADS ARE BEST WHEN THERE'S SNOW ON THE GROUND

It seems like almost all vegetables are available year-round, but just because you can buy them doesn't mean they're good. Just as August tomatoes don't compare to the pale imitations you find in January, there are vegetables that are at their best December through February.

In addition to the ubiquitous winter squash, good winter salad vegetables include cabbage, leeks, Belgian endive, fennel, celery, kale, and mustard greens.

Hearty vegetables and sturdy greens aren't the only ones to benefit from the cold; some more delicate salad greens also hit their peak in the dead of winter. The cold weather causes them to produce thicker, sturdier leaves that have a substantial fleshy feel in the mouth.

Curly endive, which can be floppy in the heat of summer, produces crisp, tender leaves in the depths of January. Thicker leaves balance the peppery flavors of arugula and watercress. Sweet, velvety mâche, or lamb's lettuce, starts its growing season in February, just when you despair of ever seeing another ripe tomato.

## CHOOSING VEGETABLES IN WINTER

Whether you're lucky enough to be choosing from a farmstand or just shopping at your local grocery store, you can have high hopes for winter salads when you know how to select good winter produce.

Heads of cabbage, celery, and fennel, as well as winter squash, should be quite firm and heavy for their size. For leeks, the smaller they are, the sweeter they'll be. Curly endive should have crisp, yellow-white leaves. (Green means the endive has seen too much light, which makes it turn bitter.) And look for greens with particularly thick leaves—they'll be the most tender.

**Tender treatment for cold-weather vegetables.** Winter vegetables are hardier than summer ones, and they require different storage methods. Fennel bulbs and their feathery tops keep crisp for more than a week in an airtight container. For leeks, keep them unwrapped in the refrigerator. When you're ready to use them, peel off the dried outer layer. Arugula and watercress should be used within a couple of days of purchase. Wrap them in a damp paper towel before packing them loosely in an airtight bag.

Winter squash and root vegetables such as potatoes and sweet potatoes are long-term keepers. These vegetables can keep for months if they're stored in a cool, dark area, such as a root cellar. Beets

should be refrigerated, but not squash or potatoes: the refrigerator is too cold and drying for them.

## TURN HEARTY VEGETABLES INTO SATISFYING SALADS

Some winter vegetables don't immediately suggest salads, but they're very susceptible to the power of a good suggestion. Here are a few:

**Tame strong vegetables by slicing them thin.** Raw fennel can be a tough mouthful, but very thin slices turn sweet and tender. Winter leeks are the sweetest, but they can still be pungent. If you use the white and dice it fine, you'll add a gentle punch to salads.

**Turn up the heat.** Ideal for winter, warm or wilted salads turn rabbit food into comfort food. A one-minute sauté will tame the flavor of strong greens like mustard and kale, and a toss in hot dressing will turn raw spinach velvety.

**The unexpected vegetable: raw squash.** Though you may have never considered eating raw squash, you should definitely try this. Raw butternut squash is sweet and crisp, and its color is a beautiful bright orange. Peel and grate, and you have the start of a memorable slaw.

Before you use the grated raw squash, you'll need to sprinkle it with a little salt; this removes an extremely tart compound from the squash. Salt it, let it sit for five minutes, pat it dry with a paper towel, and the squash is ready to use.

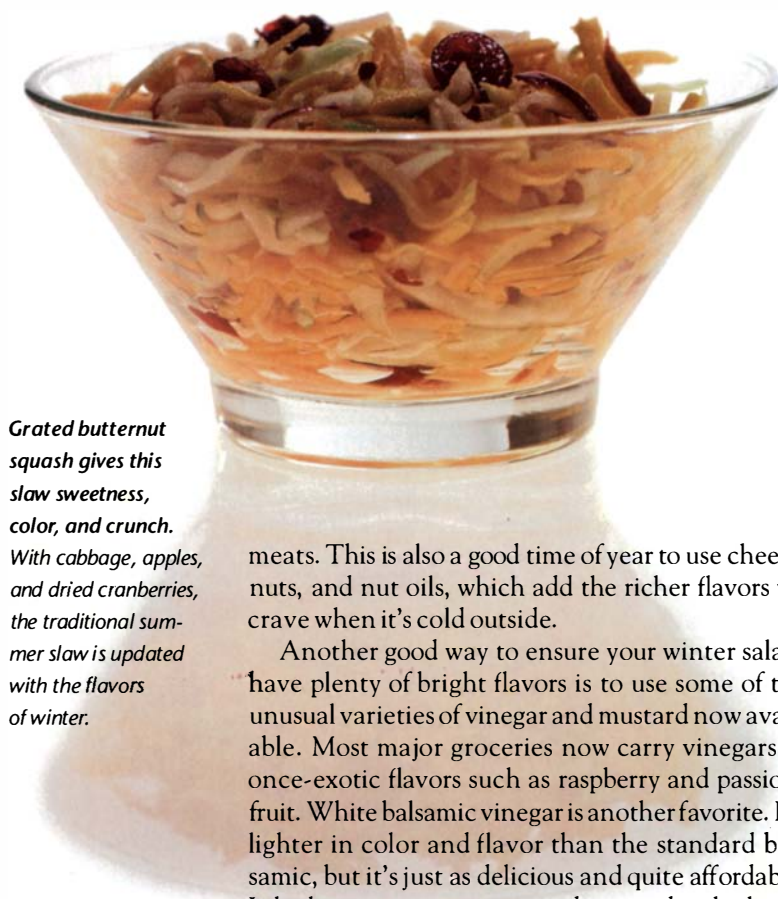
## FLAVORS I LIKE TO USE IN WINTER SALADS

The winter seasoning palette is one of my favorites. My winter-salad pantry includes apples and their ciders, maple syrup, dried fruits, seeds, and smoked

*Winter eating doesn't always have to be hearty fare. This salad of watercress, leeks, and fennel is as delicate as anything you'd find at the height of springtime.*

Even the depths  
of winter offer  
inspirational produce.





*Grated butternut squash gives this slaw sweetness, color, and crunch.*

*With cabbage, apples, and dried cranberries, the traditional summer slaw is updated with the flavors of winter.*

meats. This is also a good time of year to use cheese, nuts, and nut oils, which add the richer flavors we crave when it's cold outside.

Another good way to ensure your winter salads have plenty of bright flavors is to use some of the unusual varieties of vinegar and mustard now available. Most major groceries now carry vinegars in once-exotic flavors such as raspberry and passion-fruit. White balsamic vinegar is another favorite. It's lighter in color and flavor than the standard balsamic, but it's just as delicious and quite affordable. I also love using coarse-ground mustards, which add texture as well as flavor.

I've also found there's no need to make winter salads without the benefit of fresh herbs. Winter isn't considered a favored season for fresh salad herbs, but I love using some of the "traditional winter food" herbs in new ways. Rosemary and sage are usually associated with the Christmas roast, but they're also delicious in a warm vinaigrette.

### Spinach Salad with Roasted Sweet Potatoes & Hot Cider-Bacon Vinaigrette

I recommend using applewood-smoked slab bacon; it really makes a difference. *Serves four.*

*2 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 4 cups)*

*2 Tbs. vegetable oil*

*1 tsp. chopped fresh rosemary leaves*

*1 tsp. chopped fresh thyme*

*1/4 tsp. salt*

*1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper*

*10 oz. spinach, washed, stemmed, and dried*

*Apple Cider Vinaigrette (see recipe at right)*

**Roast the sweet potatoes**—Heat the oven to 400°F. Coat the sweet potato cubes with the oil, rosemary, thyme, salt, and pepper. Put the potatoes in a 9x13-inch pan, cover with foil, and roast for 10 min. Remove the foil, shake the pan, and continue roasting until the potatoes are tender, about another 10 min. When roasted, keep warm. (As the potatoes roast, prepare the vinaigrette.)

**Assemble the salad**—Tear the spinach leaves into bite-size pieces and put in a salad bowl. Pour the warm vinaigrette over the spinach and toss to coat. Add the sweet potatoes and toss gently. Portion the salad on individual plates and top with the crisp bacon from the vinaigrette recipe and a grinding of black pepper. Serve at once.

#### CIDER-BACON VINAIGRETTE:

*Yields 2/3 cup.*

*2 cups apple cider*

*1/2 lb. bacon, diced*

*Vegetable oil, as needed*

*2 Tbs. cider vinegar*

*1/4 tsp. freshly ground black pepper*

**Reduce the cider**—In a heavy-based pan over high heat, bring the cider to a boil. When the cider has reduced by half (about 10 min.), turn the heat to medium. When the cider has reduced by half again, turn the heat to low and begin to watch the cider closely; it can scorch easily at this point. When the reduction looks "gurgly," pour it into a glass measuring cup; you should have 1/4 cup. Set aside.

**Cook the bacon**—Sauté the diced bacon over medium-high heat until it's crisp and the fat is rendered, about 15 min. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon to drain on a paper towels. (Reserve the sauté pan for rewarming the vinaigrette.) Pour the bacon fat into a measuring cup and add enough vegetable oil to bring the level to 1/2 cup.

**Assemble the vinaigrette**—Combine the reduced cider syrup, the cider vinegar, and pepper in a small bowl. Whisk in the warm bacon fat and oil, a few drops at a time. Set aside. When ready to serve, bring the vinaigrette to a simmer in the bacon pan.



*A mandoline is an indispensable tool. There's nothing better for slicing vegetables thinly and evenly. Tough fennel, which can be a fibrous mouthful, becomes a sweet and tender treat when sliced paper-thin.*



## Winter Squash Slaw

I like using Jonathan or Winesap apples in this salad. If you like a creamy slaw, add 1 cup sour cream or *crème fraîche*. Serves four to six.

2 tart red apples, cored and grated with skins (about 1 cup)  
1/3 cup dried cranberries  
3 Tbs. passionfruit vinegar (or 3 Tbs. cider vinegar plus 2 Tbs. honey)  
1/2 small butternut squash, peeled, halved, seeded, and grated (about 3 cups)  
Salt  
1 cup shredded green cabbage  
Freshly ground black pepper

In a small bowl, toss the apples and dried cranberries with the vinegar. Set aside.

Spread the grated squash on a flat pan and sprinkle with 1/2 tsp. salt. (This draws out a bitter substance in the squash.) After 5 min., pat the squash dry and transfer it to a large bowl. Add the shredded cabbage.

Add the apple-cranberry mixture to the squash and cabbage. Mix thoroughly. Season with salt and pepper.



## Simple Salad of Watercress, Leek & Fennel

This recipe is so easy, you'll want to make it in the spring and summer, too. Since the fennel should be shaved paper-thin, this is the time to bring out your mandoline, if you have one. This salad deserves your best olive oil. Serves four.

1 fennel bulb, sliced very thin against the grain  
1 Tbs. finely minced leek (white only)  
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
1/4 tsp. salt  
Freshly ground black pepper  
3 cups watercress, washed, picked through, and dried

Combine the fennel and leek with the olive oil. Toss with salt and pepper. Add the watercress and toss gently.

## Curly Endive with Walnuts, Pears & Goat Cheese

This salad is beautiful enough to serve as the starter to a formal dinner. Serves four.

3/4 cup walnut halves  
About 1 Tbs. walnut oil  
Pinch salt  
4 slices French bread, sliced on the diagonal 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick  
1 large clove garlic, peeled and halved  
4 oz. fresh goat cheese  
Leaves from 2 heads curly endive (about 4 cups), washed, dried, and chilled  
Walnut Oil Vinaigrette (see recipe at right)  
2 pears, cut in 1-inch wedges

Toast the walnuts—Heat the oven to 300°F. Put the walnuts in a bowl and toss with 1/2 tsp. of the walnut oil and a pinch of salt. Toast the walnuts until barely golden, about 8 min. Remove and cool.

Raise the oven temperature to 400°F.

Set aside four attractive walnut halves for garnish. Chop the remaining walnuts very coarse and set aside.

Rub the bread slices with the garlic. Brush the bread with a little walnut oil and toast in the oven until light gold, about 5 min. Remove from the oven.

Lower the oven temperature to 300°F. Portion the goat cheese on the croutons, mounding the cheese slightly. Return to the oven and heat until the goat cheese is warm, about 5 min.

Meanwhile, toss the endive with the vinaigrette. Divide among four plates and top each salad with pear slices and chopped walnuts.

Remove the goat cheese croutons from the oven and top each with a walnut half. Serve immediately with the salad.

### WALNUT OIL VINAIGRETTE:

*Yields about 1/4 cup.*

1 tsp. finely minced shallot  
1 Tbs. white balsamic vinegar, champagne vinegar, or good-quality white-wine vinegar  
1/4 cup walnut oil  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Whisk the shallot and vinegar together in a small bowl. Whisk in the walnut oil, drop by drop. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

*Even in the depths of winter, this crisp, refreshing salad is in season. Curly endive with pears, walnuts, and goat cheese needs only a bowl of soup to make a great fireside supper.*

Odessa Piper is the chef/owner of L'Etoile in Madison, Wisconsin. Tammy Lax, who contributed to this article, is the restaurant's forager. L'Etoile celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year. ♦

# The Art of Menu-Making

The best meals reflect the season  
and celebrate the bounty of  
the market

BY PAUL BERTOLLI







Some of the best sources for information about food are the people who provide it. Author Paul Bertolli confers with Bill Fujimoto of Berkeley's Monterey Foods about fresh winter greens.

Beets, potatoes, parsley root, and hearty cooking greens provide inspiration for a winter meal.

Tart, jewel-like pomegranate seeds add color and a crunchy burst of flavor to a winter fruit compote.

The pleasure of a great meal comes from many sources: good company, a special occasion, the perfect place, and those intangible graces that are only recognized in the afterglow of the event. But primarily it's the food and the way a menu is structured that leaves the most lasting impression.

There are at least as many ways to assemble a menu as there cooks to imagine them. Markets that are overflowing and all the information that's available about food can make planning a menu exciting but also daunting. So many choices makes choosing difficult. Ultimately, however, the success of a menu depends on making choices that are right for the occasion.

#### START WITH THE SEASON

Understanding where food comes from is the most important starting point when making a menu. Begin by learning all you can about the seasons and what they bring. If you live in a rural area or near the sea, discover what seasonal food the local farmers and fishermen offer. If you live in a city, seek out farmers' markets.

Where I live near the San Francisco Bay, I know I'll find abundant displays of pears, figs, apples, fennel, Dungeness crab, local rockfish, turnips, and wild mushrooms in the fall. Citrus fruits are peaking and

cooking greens are particularly vibrant in winter. Spring brings local runs of salmon to the market, artichokes tender enough to eat raw, and grass-fed lamb. Late summer is the best time to make ratatouille.

At the very least, develop relationships with the people who provide your food. Get to know the greengrocer, the fishmonger, or the butcher at your supermarket. They can be a valuable resource for information about the quality of the food you buy.

**Braised short ribs seemed just right for the mood of the day. At the market, my eyes went directly to a mountain of just-picked beets.**

**Making a commitment to using seasonal, local ingredients means accepting certain limitations,** but it also opens a world of possibility. You gain a better understanding of ingredients and the cooking methods best suited to preparing them when you work with the same ingredients throughout a season. There are other advantages to buying seasonally and locally: it's likely that seasonal,

local produce is fresher (and less expensive) since it hasn't traveled far, and riper because it was picked for more immediate use.

**The weather should also influence your menu.** Bodies want warming food and tolerate weightier preparations better in cold weather. Winter is the appropriate time for long, slow braising. When it's hot outside, lighter dishes served chilled or at room temperature provide relief and refreshment.

#### MENU

Fresh Beet Salad



Short Ribs Braised in Red Wine



Mashed Potatoes with Parsley Root



Winter Greens with Garlic



Winter-Fruit Compote

Consider the time of day you'll be eating and the effect the meal will have on your guests. Plan many-course or weighty meals when there will be plenty of time for comfortable digestion. Scale down your menu if you'll be serving at a late hour, or if busy schedules don't allow for leisurely time at the table.

**Leftovers can inspire imaginative meals.** Flag-eolet beans that accompanied a leg of lamb the night before can be transformed into a soup or a gratin. Any short ribs left over from this menu can be combined with tomato and garlic to make a pasta sauce.

**A menu should reflect not only the season, but also the occasion and tastes of those who will be eating it.** Casual meals for family and friends obviously differ from more formal occasions when your guests and their tastes are less familiar to you. Although genuine hospitality tends to dissolve the distance between friends and strangers, not knowing your guests' eating habits certainly influences the choice of dishes. Generally speaking, this isn't a good time for wild experimentation.

#### LET THE MARKET DECIDE THE MEAL

Go to the market with an idea about the style of menu you want, but keep an open mind about your options. Don't make any final decisions until you see what's available. Naturally, this requires a certain leap of faith and the trust that you'll be able to cook what you find. With practice, however, you'll find your cooking less dependent upon formula and strict measurement. Rather, consider that your menu is already at the market waiting for you to discover it. Letting the market shape your menu transforms the process

of planning a meal from a conceptual exercise to a live experience. Your menus will be inspired by what you sense first hand, and they'll reflect the delight you'll find in this improvisational approach.

**Begin with a walk through the market. Touch the food, smell it, and ask for a taste.** It's never the case that everything is in prime condition. Use what you know about the season to guide you. No matter how tempting they look, avoid out-of-season foods or those that are foreign to your locale. These are likely to disappoint you both in quality and price.

Once you see what stands out, evaluate your choice more closely to determine how you might cook it. If you're unsure of what you're dealing with, ask questions. Often the fate of a food will be obvious: you won't want to sauté a cut of meat more suitable for the braising pot; if you happen on some perfectly ripe, fragrant peaches, you'd want to serve them simply rather than cook them in a cobbler. Making this kind of choice reflects the judgment of a true cook.



*Short ribs are not only a great value, they're also one of the most savory cuts of meat. When slowly braised, they have an exquisite, nearly melting texture.*







*Use a spoon to remove the pomegranate seeds from their leathery husk. When choosing pomegranates, look for large, heavy fruits with a deep-red color.*

*Beets stains can be tenacious. Peel beets over the sink and slice directly on a ceramic plate rather than on a wooden cutting board.*

*Braised short ribs cry out for mashed potatoes. The author added parsley root for extra flavor, but you can also serve the potatoes plain.*

## A WELL-ORCHESTRATED HARMONY OF PARTS

Successful menus are often described as “well orchestrated.” The musical analogy isn’t casual: successful menus are a harmony of parts, a succession of dishes that stand well on their own, yet work together. First consider whether a dish is rich or lean; think of its color, texture, and “weight.” By weight I mean the overall character of the dish, not the portion size. Weighty dishes might be described as those with deep, lingering, or complex flavors often accompanied by richness—such as the short ribs in the menu here, or a cassoulet. Lighter dishes are those with fresh, bright, and lean flavors simply stated. Each new course should avoid repetition and provide a sense of contrast or relief. Alternate dishes that differ in temperature, texture, color, richness, or weight.

### Dessert should leave your guests with a good feeling.

Decide on dessert only after the other dishes are planned, and consider the circumstances of the meal. Lunch in the middle of a business day, for instance, calls for something light and refreshing since diners won’t be relaxing after the meal.

At the other end of the menu, appetizers are equally important. Hors d’oeuvres and first courses are most effective when they genuinely provoke one to eat. Dishes with vinegary, tart, or salty accents are good choices because they can spark a sluggish appetite as well as satisfy a lively one.

Once you’ve decided the form of the menu and the placement of dishes, imagine what it might be like to see and eat the meal you’ve planned. Now is also the time to think about wine. As a general rule, wine should neither overpower nor be lost to the food. Think of wine as a condiment that can heighten the overall effect of the food by providing a

counterpoint or by harmonizing with the meal’s various components. (See “Wine Choices,” p. 43.)

## A WINTER LUNCH

The menu here was planned as a leisurely lunch for a group of friends on a cool, somewhat overcast day in early February. A simple menu of three courses seemed most fitting to offer at a lunch where at least some of the guests would be returning to work.

My butcher was cutting short ribs when I walked into his shop, and the prospect of a hearty braise seemed just right for the weather, occasion, and mood of the day. Having decided that this weighty and somewhat rich dish would be the main course, I looked for a contrasting light dish to begin and something refreshing to finish. In the produce market, my eye went directly to a mountain of just-picked beets of various colors and types. Served slightly pickled in vinaigrette, these would make a perfect appetizer. They would also provide the contrast I was looking for: a dish from a different food group, light in character, with vivid colors to offset the brown braise offered after. In the fruit section, there was a magnificent display of citrus. Nearby were some pomegranates, so plentiful and economical this time of year. Since citrus fruits aren’t naturally given to cooking and are most appealing in

their raw state, I decided to serve them peeled and sectioned in their own juice.

Next, I went looking for garnishes for the individual dishes. This day I happened to find white hearts of curly endive, an ideal accompaniment to the beets (I chose some parsley to go in the salad but set it aside when I noticed the fresh tarragon growing in the garden) and new shallots for the

vinaigrette. All the winter greens looked vibrant, but I settled on a combination of red and green chard and two kinds of kale to accompany the beef. Braised short ribs scream for mashed potatoes, and since fresh parsley root was available, I used it to embellish the potato mixture.

## Fresh Beet Salad

Perhaps the best way to cook beets is to bake them in their skins so that they retain their full flavor and texture. Small beets, 1 to 1½ inches in diameter, take about 1 hour. Larger beets need 15 to 20 minutes longer. *Serves eight.*

*2¼ lb. beets (about 12), topped (save the tops if still vibrant and add to the sautéed winter greens)  
1¼ cups water  
¾ lb. curly endive (frisée), pale centers only (from about 3 small heads)*

*(Ingredient list continues on next page)*

**Each new course should provide a sense of contrast. Alternate dishes that differ in temperature, texture, richness, and color.**



*Beets make a stunning salad, particularly if you're able to mix in the pink and golden varieties along with the more common deep-burgundy type.*

**1 large egg**  
**1 Tbs. minced fresh parsley or tarragon**

**FOR THE MUSTARD VINAIGRETTE:**  
**2 shallots, minced**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup plus 1 tsp. white-wine vinegar**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 Tbs. Dijon mustard**  
 **$\frac{1}{2}$  cup extra-virgin olive oil**

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a baking dish, combine the beets and water. Cover tightly with foil and bake until the beets are tender, 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 min. Remove the foil, let cool, and then rub off the beet skins.

Meanwhile, make the vinaigrette. In a small bowl, combine the shallots and vinegar. Add a little salt and pepper. Whisk in the mustard and then the olive oil. Slice the beets, some in rounds, some in little sticks. Season lightly with more salt and pepper and toss with some of the vinaigrette (save the rest to dress the endive). Set aside to pickle the beets slightly.

Cover the egg with cold water, bring to a boil, cover with a lid, turn off the heat, and let the egg stand for 11 min. Cool the egg under cold water, peel, and coarsely chop it.

When ready to serve, dress the endive with the remaining vinaigrette and divide it among eight chilled salad plates. Top with the sliced beets. Garnish each plate with some of the egg and sprigs of parsley or tarragon.

### Short Ribs Braised in Red Wine

Be sure you buy bone-in short ribs and, if possible, have them cut to include at least three bones. Also, ask your butcher to provide you with the leanest ribs. Salting the meat and leaving it to sit overnight allows the salt to penetrate, giving the ribs a more savory flavor as well as tenderizing them. *Serves eight.*



**8 lean bone-in short ribs (about 8 lb. total)**  
**Kosher salt**  
**Freshly ground black pepper**  
**1 large carrot, diced**  
**1 rib celery, diced**  
**1 large onion, diced**  
 **$\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh parsley**  
**2 cups red wine (preferably the one you'll drink with the meal)**  
 **$1\frac{1}{4}$  cups water**

**Salting the ribs**—The night before you cook the ribs, trim any excess fat and sprinkle each rib on all sides with a scant teaspoon salt. Set a cooling rack on a baking sheet and put the ribs on the rack. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 8 hours.

**Braising the ribs**—Heat the oven to 350°F. Season the ribs with pepper. In a heavy frying pan over medium-high heat, brown the ribs well on all sides, a few at a time, without crowding the pan. Pour off all but 2 Tbs. of the fat. Add the carrot, celery, and onion. Reduce the heat and cook until the vegetables begin to soften, about 5 min., scraping up any residue left from browning the ribs. Add a little water to deglaze the pan thoroughly.





*This menu offers just what you want in winter—a hearty braised beef main course with lots of bright complements from fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables.*

*The bright colors and fresh acidic flavors of this winter fruit compote provide the perfect contrast to the rich dishes that come before.*

Spread the vegetables on the bottom of a baking pan that will accommodate the ribs neatly. Set the ribs on top of the vegetables and add the parsley, wine, and water. Cover the pan tightly with aluminum foil and cook in the hot oven until the ribs are very tender, about 2 hours and 20 min. Test by inserting the tip of a knife into the meat at its thickest point. It should be very tender but not falling off the bone. Keep the ribs warm in a low oven until ready to serve.

Pour the braising liquid through a sieve into a measuring cup and spoon off all visible fat. In a saucepan, reduce the degreased braising liquid by about one-third of its volume to concentrate its flavor.

Serve the ribs on warm plates and sauce them generously with the reduced cooking liquid.

## Mashed Potatoes with Parsley Root

Be sure to ladle some of the wine-laced juices from the short ribs over these tangy, buttermilk-enriched mashed potatoes. Serves eight.

**2 lb. red potatoes, peeled and quartered**  
**1/2 lb. parsley root, diced**  
 (or 1/4 lb. parsnip, 1/2 lb. celery root, or 1 lb. fennel bulb)  
**3 Tbs. unsalted butter**  
**3/4 cup buttermilk**  
**Salt and freshly ground black pepper**

In a large saucepan, combine the potatoes and parsley root with lightly salted water to cover. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook until the potatoes and parsley root are very soft, 20 to 25 min. Drain.

Pass the potatoes and parsley root through the finest blade of a food mill or a potato ricer. Add the butter, then the buttermilk, and whisk until well incorporated. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper as needed.

## Winter Greens with Garlic

The day of our lunch, I found red and green chard, Russian kale, and green kale in the market. You may substitute the beet greens, collards, or any other seasonal cooking green. Serves eight.

**4 lb. winter greens, tough stems trimmed and leaves cut into 1-inch strips**

**Salt**

**3 Tbs. olive oil**

**4 large cloves garlic, chopped**

**Freshly ground black pepper**

Wash the greens in several changes of water, but do not dry them. Heat a large stockpot over medium heat. Add the greens and a little salt. With a pair of tongs or a large spoon, turn the greens until they collapse. The water clinging to the greens from the washing and their own juice is probably enough to cook them; however, add a little more water if the pot runs dry, or if you notice that the greens aren't wilting quickly. When the greens are tender, remove them from the pot and drain any excess water. Add the olive oil to the pot and heat it. Toss in the garlic and, when it releases its perfume, return the greens. Cook over medium heat until the greens are tender, 5 to 10 min. longer. Taste for seasoning and add salt and pepper as needed.

## Winter Fruit Compote

This is simply ripe citrus and pomegranate seeds served in their own juice. Serves eight.

**4 blood oranges**  
**4 tangerines**  
**3 grapefruit**  
**Seeds of 2 large pomegranates**  
**Sugar (optional)**  
**1 tsp. chopped fresh mint**  
**Fresh mint leaves for garnish**

Use a thin, sharp knife to cut away all the peel and white pith of the citrus fruits. Reserve the peels. Then, holding the fruit over a bowl to catch any juice, cut along the dividing membranes of the sections towards the center of the fruit, and release the segments into the bowl. Squeeze the membranes over the fruit in the bowl. Twist the reserved peels over the bowl to release their aromatic oils.

Add the pomegranate seeds. Taste for sweetness and add a bit of sugar, if you like. Stir in the chopped mint. Chill until ready to serve. Garnish with fresh mint leaves.

*Paul Bertolli is the chef and a co-owner of Oliveto Restaurant in Oakland, California, and a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦*

# Wine Choices



## A braised beef menu needs spicy, rustic reds

This menu calls for hearty uncomplicated wine to match its easygoing mood. Forget the elegant Cabernets and fragile crystal stemware—just relax, set out some sturdy, big-bowled glasses and uncork something you don't have to ponder.

Petite Sirah isn't the inky, rough-textured monster it used to be: you'll now find friendlier versions, notably from Concannon and Foppiano. Syrah (not closely related, despite the name; also called Shiraz in Australia and South Africa) and blends containing it

and its Rhone Valley relatives will add a good dose of black pepper spice (look for Preston, Joseph Phelps, or Rosemount). Or try an easy-drinking Tuscan Chianti, such as Ruffino or Antinori.

My hands-down favorite, though, would be a spicy, fruity Zinfandel—red of course. Smooth textured and full flavored, Zins work beautifully with rustic, bistro-style braises and stews. What's more, they show a special affinity for beets, which bring out

their berry fruit, and they're friendly to the garlic and greens. Some of the best examples come from Sonoma, including Dry Creek, Rafanelli, and Seghesio.

Whatever your choice, using some of the same wine in the recipe will help bring the flavors in the glass and the flavors on the plate that much closer together. —*Rosina Tinari Wilson, a food and wine writer and teacher based in the San Francisco area, is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking.*



*Slices of compound butter look like pretty mosaics. Top a broiled fillet of fish or a chicken breast with a slice for a quick, colorful sauce.*

# Adding Flavor to Butter

Just soften and stir to make beautiful compound butters

BY RENIE STEVES

Compound butter is nothing more than butter flavored with herbs, fruits, or vegetables. Even though it's easy to make, it has the reputation of being a project reserved for restaurant chefs. I think that's because compound butter looks so beautiful. Whether you cut mosaic-like slices or scoop out spheres, guests are amazed to see confetti-like flavorings suspended in butter.

Aesthetics aside, compound butters have a very practical purpose: they allow the cook to quickly and easily add a lot of flavor to a dish. A plain chicken breast becomes a one-step main dish when you sauté it in compound butter, and pastries and sauces take on new dimensions of flavor when you substitute compound butter for plain.

## CHOOSE GUTSY FLAVORS

Compound butters taste best when you infuse them with intense flavors. For inspiration, look at the small jars that line your refrigerator door. Salty condiments, such as capers and olives, are excellent

additions, as are fresh herbs and distinctively flavored vegetables (scallions, red peppers) or fruits (blackberries, strawberries). To maximize flavor and minimize moisture, grill, smoke, or sauté vegetables before adding them to the butter. No matter what you add, the butter holds together best if the ingredients are puréed or diced fine.

Even if you don't want a tart compound butter, it's important to blend in a small amount of lemon juice, lime juice, wine, or vinegar. This acts as a spark on the tongue, encouraging the flavors to break from the smooth, sweet butter. For a bright citrus flavor without liquid, substitute zest for juice. Likewise, adding just the right amount of salt brings flavors to their peak.

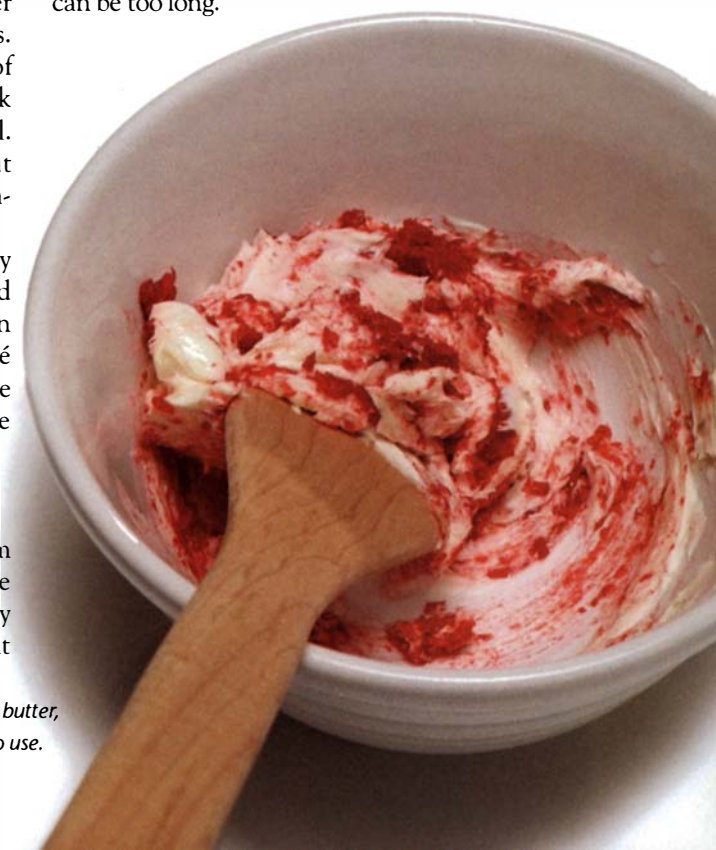
## SOFT, SWEET BUTTER MAKES IT EASY

Since the main ingredient is butter, use the best. This means high-quality unsalted butter, which has less water, less air, and fresher cream—and it allows you to control the amount of salt in the finished product.

The first step in making compound butter is softening. There's no trick to softening butter—just leave it out at room temperature—but don't let it get too soft. The butter should yield easily but still hold its shape when pressed with a fingertip. A microwave set on defrost will soften a frozen stick of butter in minutes, but watch carefully; even an extra second can be too long.



*Sauté cranberries, or other flavorings, before mixing with butter. This removes excess water and intensifies the flavors.*



*Making compound butter is a simple matter. Soften the butter, sauté the flavoring, and stir; the butter's then ready to use.*



Most of the recipes here can be made in a food processor, but a few must be mixed by hand to maintain texture. In either case, avoid overmixing, which can make the butter too soft or break down the flavor additions too far. Overmixing can even upset the emulsified consistency of butter and lead to a curdled texture.

### STORE THE BUTTER IN TUBS OR ROLLS

How you store the butter depends on how you plan to use it. If you want to use it as a simple spread, transfer it to a sealed container. This also is fine if you plan to scoop out decorative rounds with a melon baller, or if you want to pipe the softened butter through a pastry tube (decorative dollops on toast rounds make an excellent appetizer).

I like to roll up a compound butter in waxed paper to form a long cylinder about 1½ inches in diameter. These logs are easy to store, freeze well, and make it easy to cut off a small chunk for the sauté pan, or to slice ¼-inch rounds to top grilled meats (just use a warm knife). To make cylinders of compound butter, cut a 12-inch-long sheet of waxed paper. Spread the soft compound butter in a 2-inch-wide strip across the center of the paper. Fold the top half of the paper over the butter, shape the butter into a cylinder, and roll the butter toward you, as if the waxed paper were a carpet. Twist the ends of the paper. If you plan to freeze the butter or refrigerate it for more than a week, seal it in plastic wrap.

### Cranberry Butter

Perfect for muffins and scones. *Yields about 1 cup.*

*¼ cup fresh cranberries*  
*15 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature*  
*2 Tbs. sugar*  
*Pinch salt*  
*1 tsp. fresh lemon juice*

Wash the cranberries and dry them well. Chop them fine in a food processor. Melt 3 Tbs. butter in a skillet and sauté the cranberries over medium heat for 4 min. Add the sugar and salt, stirring well. Cook until the sugar is melted, stirring often. Remove the mixture from the skillet, stir in the lemon juice, and let cool at room temperature or in the refrigerator. Mix the cooled mixture by hand into the remaining butter.

### Roquefort Butter

A delicious hors d'oeuvre when piped on crackers. *Yields about ⅔ cup.*

*2 tsp. minced shallot*  
*8 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. unsalted butter, at room temperature*  
*3 oz. Roquefort cheese, crumbled, at room temperature*  
*⅛ tsp. fresh lemon juice*  
*Freshly ground black pepper to taste*

Sauté the shallots in 1 tsp. butter. Let cool and then mix with the remaining ingredients in a food processor.

### Roasted Red Pepper Butter

Excellent when tossed with pasta. *Yields about ¾ cup.*

*1 small red bell pepper*  
*1 small clove garlic, minced*  
*¼ cup minced onion*  
*2 Tbs. olive oil*  
*8 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature*  
*2 to 3 dashes Tabasco*  
*1 Tbs. minced fresh oregano*  
*Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste*

Blacken the red pepper over a gas flame or in a 450°F oven. Put the pepper in a paper bag, close tightly, and allow it to steam until it's cool enough to handle. Remove the skin, seeds, and ribs. Dice the flesh fine and set aside.

Sauté the garlic and onion in the olive oil until soft and transparent. Let cool and then mix all the ingredients together by hand.

### Fresh Herb Butter

This all-purpose butter is good on everything from grilled fish to mashed potatoes. *Yields about 1⅓ cups.*

*1 cup parsley leaves, loosely packed (no stems)*  
*¼ cup snipped fresh chives*  
*1 medium clove garlic, minced*  
*2 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves*  
*1½ tsp. fresh rosemary leaves*  
*4 fresh tarragon sprigs*  
*Dash of cayenne*  
*Salt and freshly ground white pepper to taste*  
*16 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature*  
*1 tsp. fresh lemon juice*

Wash the parsley and squeeze it dry in a towel. Put all the ingredients, except the butter and lemon juice, in a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Chop well, turning the processor on and off 10 to 12 times. Add the butter and the lemon juice. Mix well and taste for additional seasoning.

### Apricot-Lemon Butter

Try this in pastries or on toast. *Yields about ¾ cup.*

*¼ cup dried apricots*  
*8 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature*  
*1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice*  
*3 Tbs. confectioners' sugar*

Stew the dried apricots by covering with water and cooking over low heat until soft. Drain. Let cool slightly and purée. Mix all the ingredients together.

Renie Steves owns Cuisine Concepts, a cooking school and consulting firm in Fort Worth, Texas. ♦



Scoop out rounds of butter with a melon baller. Flecks of roasted red pepper give this compound butter a jeweled effect.



Rolls of compound butter are convenient to use. A slice of herb butter will look beautiful on a bread plate.



*Grapefruit and rosemary  
make an unusual but  
exciting match in this  
not-too-sweet cake.  
The finished cake is  
flipped upside down to  
show off the pretty  
sections of grapefruit.*

Photos: Mark Thomas



# Citrus Fruits Brighten Dessert

Oranges, grapefruits, lemons, and limes—  
in season and at their best now—wake up winter dishes

BY ANDREW MACLAUCHLAN

Citrus fruits evoke sun-kissed climates, which may be why I especially enjoy them during the gray days of winter. Baking with citrus fruits—oranges, grapefruits, lemons, limes, and tangerines are the most common—offers a great change of pace this time of year when I've had my fill of apple and pear desserts. I also find the tart, acidic nature of citrus refreshing at the end of a meal, especially a heavy winter dinner.

Because of their acidity, citrus fruits work great in baking; their tart flavors overcome the sometimes eggy nature of cakes, custards, and soufflés. The challenge when cooking with citrus fruits is finding a proper balance between sweet and tart, which is why the right amount of sugar in recipes is very important.

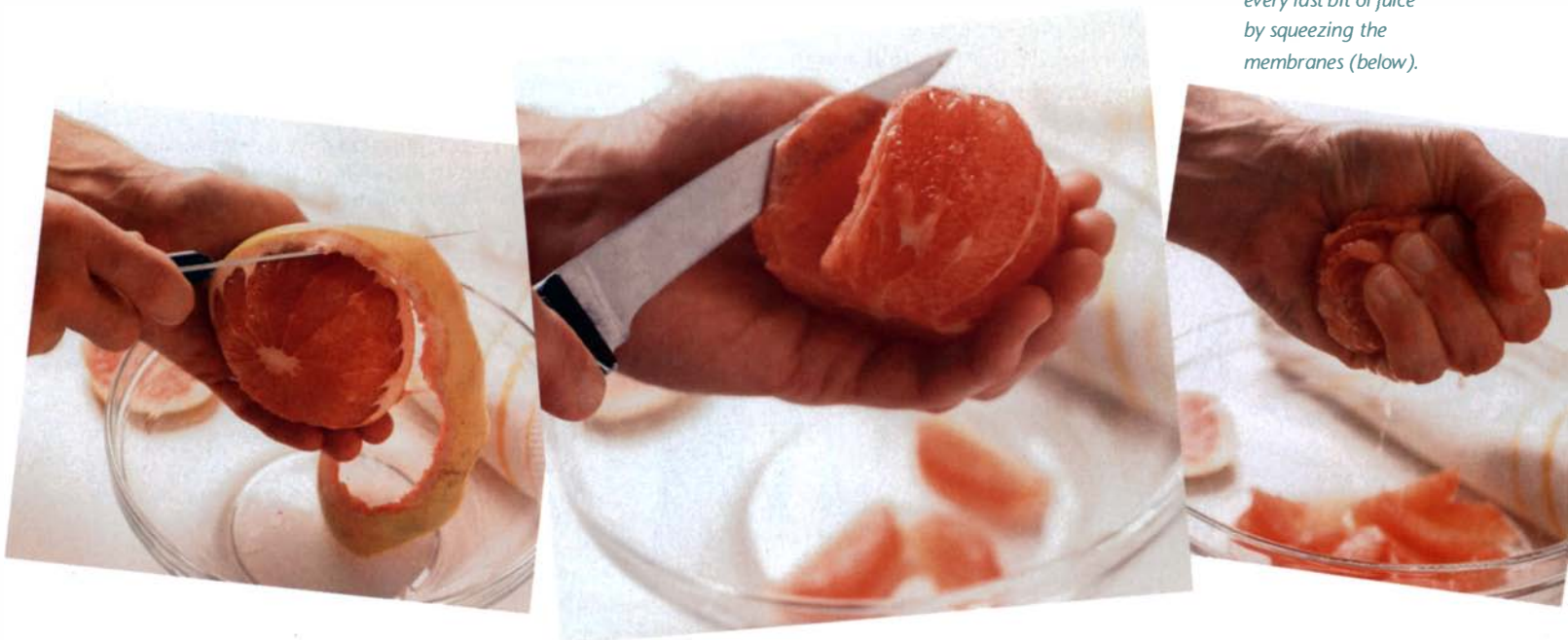
I'm always experimenting with wonderful ways to enjoy citrus fruits, including pairing them with herbs and spices to create complex yet pleasing taste sensations (see sidebar on p. 50). For example, lemon tart, one of my favorite desserts, pairs well with dried cherries enlivened with brandy, black pepper, and basil. A grapefruit cake scented with rosemary may seem a little unusual, but when you smell the heady aroma of the cake baking, you'll want a piece immediately. (See recipes on pp. 48–50.) But before you bake with citrus, you must choose the best fruit.

## HOW TO TELL IF AN ORANGE IS A LEMON: SEASONALITY AND SELECTION

During the winter, citrus fruits are at their sweetest, juiciest, and most flavorful. These fruits are ideal for

## CUTTING CITRUS SECTIONS

*For pretty and neat citrus sections, use a sharp knife to peel the fruit (left). Then cut along the dividing membranes of the sections towards the center of the fruit, removing the whole, peeled sections as you go (middle). Get every last bit of juice by squeezing the membranes (below).*



winter desserts when other common dessert fruits, such as berries, peaches, and plums, aren't available.

**For the juiciest fruits, choose those that are heaviest for their size.** Weight indicates content, so heft and good body are signs that the fruit is full of juice. Lighter, less firm fruits are likely to be dry.

**Seasonality also affects flavor.** Oranges may blossom and mature year-round, but they peak from November to May, and the brightly colored blood orange is available only from December to April. The peak season for grapefruit is slightly longer than oranges, from late fall to late spring. Lemons grow year-round with little variation in fragrance and taste, but limes are best during winter and late spring. Different varieties of tangerines appear from November to April.

**Color is a less dependable criterion for selecting citrus.**

Contrary to their name, oranges may be green or yellow when fully ripe, sweet, and juicy. Ripe grapefruit may be greenish yellow, while pink grapefruit may have a pinkish or ruby-red tinge.

Color can be a little more telling for lemons and limes. Greenish lemons tend to be more acidic and sour; yellow ones are slightly sweeter. Less mature limes are green, and fully mature ones are yellow. Tangerines and kumquats turn deep orange when ripe.

#### USING THE PARTS OF THE WHOLE

One of the nice things about citrus fruits is that nearly every part of the fruit—the rind, the flesh, and the juice—can be used to add flavor to desserts.

**Zest adds a bright burst of citrus flavor** to fresh-cut fruit, compotes, cakes, and custards. For zest, use only the colored part of the rind, not the white pith. Make fresh zest by grating the rind on a fine grater or by peeling it into strips. For a sweeter alternative,

candy the zest (see photos below). I like to add candied zest to sorbets, ice creams, cakes, tarts, and mousses.

**To cut fruit into sections, use a sharp knife** to cut away the peel and pith. Then, holding the fruit over a bowl to catch any juice, cut along the dividing membranes of the sections towards the center of the fruit, removing the whole peeled sections as you go (see photos p. 47). Use citrus

sections in salads, compotes, or layered desserts, or bake them into cakes and custards.

**Use flavorful citrus juice** as the base for sorbets, ice creams, or ices, or reduce it and add sugar to make a light sauce.

Finally, thin slices of whole citrus fruits, with or without the peel, make pretty garnishes for cakes, pies, and tarts.

The tart flavors of citrus overcome the sometimes eggy nature of cakes, custards, and soufflés.

#### MAKING CANDIED ZEST

*Zest the fruit with a peeler, which will make large strips that you can use whole or cut into julienne (below left). Blanch the zest in water for 10 minutes, drain, and blanch again for another 10 minutes. Simmer the blanched zest in syrup (made from equal parts of sugar and water) until translucent, 30 to 45 minutes. Drain the candied zest and use it immediately, or refrigerate it in its syrup for up to two weeks.*



#### Grapefruit Upside-Down Cake with Rosemary

Ruby Red grapefruit looks especially pretty on this cake. Nut, flour, and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups and tablespoons). Use either measurement. *Yields one 10-inch cake; serves twelve.*

**8 oz. (2 cups) slivered almonds, toasted**  
**2 Tbs. coarsely chopped fresh rosemary**  
**2 Tbs. honey**  
**2 tsp. vanilla extract**  
**12 oz. (24 Tbs.) unsalted butter**  
**2 cups sugar**  
**4½ oz. (1 cup) all-purpose flour**  
**10 large egg whites**  
**2 grapefruit, peel and pith removed, sectioned and drained on a paper towel**

In a food processor, pulverize the toasted almonds to a fine powder and set aside. Finely chop 1 Tbs. of the rosemary. In a small bowl, stir together the finely chopped rosemary, the honey, and the vanilla and set aside.

In a medium, heavy-based saucepan, melt the butter with the remaining 1 Tbs. rosemary. Cook until the butter begins to brown and has a nutty, slightly smoky aroma, about 10 min.; don't let it burn. Cool to room temperature.

Butter the bottom and side of a 10-inch round spring-form pan with a 3-inch rim. Line the bottom with kitchen parchment; butter the parchment and dust it lightly with additional sugar.

In a large bowl, mix the sugar, flour, and almonds. In another bowl, beat the egg whites to soft peaks. Strain the butter into the dry ingredients. Add the honey mixture; mix thoroughly. Fold in the egg whites until incorporated.





*A hint of allspice adds a little mystery to caramelized oranges and chocolate mousse. Serve the oranges while warm to contrast with the cool, smooth mousse.*

Heat the oven to 350°F. Arrange the grapefruit sections in one layer on the bottom of the cake pan. Pour the batter over the fruit. Bake until the cake is well risen, firm on top, and a toothpick stuck into the center comes out clean, 65 to 75 min. You may want to put a piece of foil on the oven's lower shelf to catch any drips.

Cool the pan on a rack for 15 min. Set a serving plate over the cake pan and invert the cake onto the plate. Gently lift off the pan. Slice and serve warm.

## Caramelized Allspice Oranges with Dark-Chocolate Mousse

Because the mousse needs to chill before serving, you may want to have it ready before you cook the oranges. *Serves eight.*

**FOR THE ORANGES:**  
5 navel oranges  
¾ cup sugar



*A new approach to the classic match of lemon and cherries: the heat of the pepper-spiked dried cherry sauce complements the cool, sour lemon custard.*

1½ tsp. ground allspice  
Pinch salt  
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

### FOR THE MOUSSE:

¾ cup warm water  
8 oz. high-quality bittersweet chocolate, melted and cooled  
1½ cups heavy cream, whipped to soft but firm peaks  
½ tsp. ground cinnamon

*Pistachios, chocolate shavings, or whipped cream to garnish, if desired*

**To caramelize the oranges**—Remove the zest from one of the oranges, cut it into thin strips, and set aside. Remove the peel and pith from all the oranges. Working over a bowl to catch the juice, cut the oranges into sections. After all the sections are removed, squeeze the membranes to extract their juice. Discard the membranes; reserve the juice and sections separately.

In a large saucepan, melt the sugar over medium heat. Cook, stirring and shaking the pan often, until the sugar turns a dark amber color. Carefully pour the reserved orange juice into the pan. Continue stirring as the mixture bubbles until the sugar dissolves completely. Add the orange sections, allspice, salt, pepper, and zest. Bring to a simmer and cook for 2 min. Remove from the heat.

**To make the mousse**—Whisk the hot water into the cooled melted chocolate. Cool completely. Fold the whipped cream and cinnamon into the chocolate until thoroughly combined. Fold carefully and don't overmix or the cream may go flat. Chill for at least 15 min.

**To assemble**—Put the warm oranges and their syrup in dessert bowls or goblets. Top with a scoop of chocolate mousse. Garnish with pistachios, chocolate shavings, or whipped cream, if desired.

## Lemon Tart with Dried Sour Cherries

Flour and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups and tablespoons). Use either measurement. *Yields one 10-inch tart; serves ten to twelve.*

### FOR THE SHORT-DOUGH CRUST:

9 oz. (2 cups) flour  
¼ cup sugar  
Pinch salt  
6 oz. (12 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into pieces  
1 whole egg  
1 egg, separated

*(Ingredient list continues on next page)*

## DELICIOUS—AND SOMETIMES UNEXPECTED—FLAVOR PARTNERS FOR CITRUS

I think citrus pairs well with lots of ingredients. Some of my suggestions may seem familiar, others less so. Try adapting them to your favorite recipes.

♦ **Sweet oranges are excellent with bittersweet chocolate**, as in a dark-chocolate cake with blood-orange sauce. Rich, intense coffee flavorings are also complemented by sweet, fruity oranges. Nutmeg, cloves, allspice, black pepper, cumin, and anise enhance and add complexity to oranges. I like to pair oranges and pistachios, as the nut's rich, luxurious flavor holds up well to



the sweet, acidic citrus, but almost any type of nut works well with orange. Basil also pairs well with orange.

♦ **Grapefruit and caramel are a perfect match.** The sharp bitterness of the grapefruit is tempered by the smoky sweetness of cooked sugar. Good spice foils for grapefruit are cinnamon, caraway, and rosemary.

♦ **The bright tanginess of lemon revives the full, complex flavors of dried fruits**, such as Black Mission figs, dried cherries, or dried blueberries. The nutty smokiness of black pepper is a wonderful way to enhance lemon, pairing sensations of the cool, sour citrus with a touch of heat from the pepper. Both mint and basil complement the brightness of lemon.

♦ **Limes are excellent with tropical fruits, especially papaya.** Fresh papayas sprinkled with lime juice is a traditional dessert in the tropics. Or, for something slightly more complex, try a tropical fruit compote with lime sorbet or ice cream.

### FOR THE LEMON CUSTARD:

6 lemons  
6 eggs  
¾ cup crème fraîche  
1 cup sugar

### FOR THE DRIED-CHERRY SAUCE:

3 cups dried cherries  
¼ cup sugar  
1 cup water  
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
2 tsp. cornstarch  
2 Tbs. kirsch or other brandy  
2 leaves fresh basil, chopped

**To make the short dough**—Sift the flour, sugar, and salt into a large bowl. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut the butter into the dry ingredients until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the whole egg and the egg yolk and mix with a wooden spoon until the dough comes together and the ingredients are thoroughly combined. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and chill at least 1 hour before rolling out. (This dough may be refrigerated for up to 2 days or frozen up to 2 weeks.)

**To blind-bake the tart crust**—Heat the oven to 375°F. On a lightly floured surface, roll the chilled dough to a round ⅛ inch thick. Line a 10-inch tart pan with a 1-inch rim with the dough. Cover the dough with a double thickness of foil and fill with dry weights, such as dried beans. Bake the tart shell until dry but not beginning to brown, about 20 min. Meanwhile, lightly beat the egg white. Remove the foil and dry weights and lightly brush the crust with some of the beaten egg white. Return the crust to the oven, uncovered, and cook until no longer wet, about 5 min. (The egg-white glaze will seal the crust and keep it from turning soggy.)

**To make the custard**—Remove the zest from 2 lemons and chop it very fine. Juice all the lemons to get about 1¾ cups of juice. Combine the zest and juice. Whisk the eggs with the juice mixture.

Whisk together the crème fraîche and sugar. Add half the egg-juice mixture and whisk well. Add the remaining egg mixture and whisk until well combined. Pour into a heavy-based saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon. Don't let the mixture boil. Transfer the custard to a bowl, cover the surface with plastic wrap to prevent a skin from forming, and refrigerate until needed (up to 2 days).

**To assemble the tart**—Heat the oven to 300°F. Pour the lemon mixture into the tart shell and bake until the custard is set, about 25 min.

**To prepare the cherries**—In a saucepan over medium-low heat, combine the cherries, sugar, water, and pepper. Dissolve the cornstarch in the kirsch. Whisk the cornstarch mixture into the cherry mixture and simmer, stirring, until thickened, about 3 min. Stir in the basil.

Serve the tart at once or refrigerate it for up to 4 hours. To serve, surround each slice with some of the sauce.

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Andrew MacLauchlan, author of *New Classic Desserts* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1995) is the corporate pastry chef for the Coyote Cafés in Santa Fe, Austin, and Las Vegas, where there's usually a citrus dessert on the menu. ♦





# Boston Brown Bread Cooks in a Steamer

Molasses gives the bread flavor, steaming makes it moist

BY JUDY MONROE

*A pretty mold makes Boston brown bread more shapely. To remove the hot bread, simply invert the mold onto a plate and lift it off.*

**B**oston brown bread, as its name implies, hails from New England, where many people have fond memories of grandmothers making the moist, full-flavored loaf. They recall the bread's sweet taste of molasses and the telltale ripples that revealed it was cooked in a coffee can.

My introduction to Boston brown bread, however, comes by way of Asia. A few years ago, while doing research for a book on Asian cooking, I grew quite fond of my bamboo steamer and the idea of steaming food. Around this time, I came across a recipe for Boston brown bread. The connection? Boston brown bread, for those of you whose grandmothers didn't make it, is steamed, not baked. My curiosity piqued, I made a loaf and fell in love with the bread's ginger color, its dense yet moist texture, and its intense flavor.

## TRADITIONAL INGREDIENTS, TIMELESS FLAVOR

Recipes for Boston brown bread may vary slightly, but its few ingredients have remained essentially unchanged since before the American Revolution. Back then, it was also called "one-thirded bread" because it's made with equal amounts of three different flours, usually whole wheat, cornmeal, and rye. It's still made with these flours today, although all-purpose white flour may be substituted for the whole wheat.

**Molasses gives the bread its distinct, somewhat sweet taste.** I use the more refined light- or medium-grade molasses. Until recently, molasses often tasted of sulfur because sulfur dioxide was used to lighten and clarify the cane juice. Nowadays, most molasses comes unsulfured, which I much prefer.



*A taut line of heavy thread cuts a neat slice. Sawing slowly with a sharp, serrated knife also works well.*

The rest of the bread's short list of ingredients are salt, baking soda, and a liquid.

**For rich flavor, use buttermilk.** Early brown bread recipes often called for water as the liquid ingredient, but I've found that the tang of buttermilk helps balance the bread's flavor, cutting its sweetness just a little. It may also explain why my Boston brown bread—which is delicious right out of the steamer—sometimes tastes even better after a few days, as the buttermilk flavor becomes more pronounced.

### **STEAMING MAKES THE BREAD WONDERFULLY MOIST**

Steaming bread may seem a little unusual, but you don't need any special equipment or skills to do it. You simply pour the batter into a container, cover it tightly, and steam the bread in a large pot on the stovetop or in the oven. You do need a little time, however, as the steaming takes about three hours. That's because steam cooks food at about 212°F—the temperature of boiling water—which is much lower than standard bread-baking temperature.

**The right pan for steaming Boston brown bread is usually what's on hand.** I've seen cooking catalogs from the late 1800s that offer pans specifically designed for baking Boston brown bread. These slender metal cylinders flare out slightly at the top and come with a metal lid that fits the pan tightly. Some lucky cooks have found or inherited such pans, but I'm still looking. In the meantime, I do just fine with a greased steamed pudding mold; it works perfectly because it's heatproof and has a tight-fitting lid. Pudding molds also come in a variety of shapes and make pretty loaves. No steamed pudding mold? No problem. You can use any heatproof bowl, such as stainless steel, Pyrex, or Corning Ware. If

the bowl has no lid, grease a piece of foil and secure it, greased side down, by pinching it around the rim of the bowl or mold. For added security, ring the foil with a rubber band, which is safe to steam.

Many recipes recommend baking Boston brown bread in an empty coffee can. But I've stopped using coffee cans since I read that the cans may release toxins when heated and that coffee companies themselves advise against using the cans for cooking.

Whatever mold you use, grease it to keep the bread from sticking. Fill it with batter until it's one-half to two-thirds full: the extra space allows the batter to expand as it cooks. Be sure the mold's lid is tightly secured. If the bread is not well covered, steam that condenses on the inside of the steamer's lid may fall into the batter. This happened to me once, and I ended up with a very soggy loaf of bread.

**Use a steamer or a large pot to steam the bread.** I have a wonderful steamer that's large enough to easily accommodate my mold. To use a steamer, bring a few inches of water to boil in the larger bottom pot. Set the mold in the smaller upper pot (the one with the perforated bottom) with the mold's lid side up. Cover the steamer, lower the heat to simmer, and steam the bread for three hours. If you don't have a steamer or a steamer insert, set a rack or a trivet on the bottom of a large pot for the mold to rest on. Add enough water to come halfway up the mold and steam the bread as you would in a steamer. Check on the water level occasionally and add some boiling water if the level drops too low.

**You can also steam the bread in the oven,** something I often do while also making baked beans. Follow the same steps as for steaming on the stove, but use an ovenproof pot. The bread cooks in about three hours in a 300° oven.



*The bread batter should be almost smooth, with some small lumps. Pour the batter into a greased mold to prevent sticking.*



*The bread steams on the stove in a steamer or a large pot. After three hours, it's cooked and ready to eat.*



## UNMOLD THE BREAD AND SERVE IT HOT

After three hours of steaming, your bread should be cooked. To test if it's done, insert a toothpick in the center and pull it out; it should have just a few crumbs clinging to it, not any wet dough. Take the bread out of the steamer and let it rest for about five minutes in its mold (with the lid off). To get the bread out of the mold, lay an upside down plate where the lid was and turn the whole thing over so that the bread is already on the plate when you lift off the mold. Some people toast the freshly steamed loaf of bread in a 400° to 450° oven for five to ten minutes to dry the outside slightly, but I'm too impatient: I slice it as soon as I unmold it.

**Traditionalists slice hot Boston brown bread with a taut line of heavy thread**, insisting that this will keep the moist slices from compressing. I find that a sharp, serrated knife works just as well. If I'm careful and saw slowly, my slices are fine.

Although it's traditionally served alongside Boston baked beans, the bread makes great sandwiches. I also toast slices and spread them with a little butter or cream cheese. An old-fashioned dessert I enjoy calls for breaking the bread into bite-size pieces and topping them with sweetened sour cream and a bit of nutmeg.

Boston brown bread keeps for up to five days if tightly wrapped and refrigerated. It also freezes well.



## Boston Brown Bread

This is the traditional recipe, but you can experiment with other flours or dried fruit (see below). Note: Flour quantities are given in weight (ounces) for cooks who use a scale and in volume (cups) for cooks who prefer a cup measurement. *Serves six to eight.*

*4¼ oz. (1 cup) whole-wheat flour*  
*4¼ oz. (1 cup) light or dark rye flour*  
*5¼ oz. (1 cup) yellow cornmeal*  
*2 tsp. baking soda*  
*1 tsp. salt*  
*1 cup light or medium molasses*  
*2 cups buttermilk*

Grease a 3-qt. stainless-steel bowl, pudding mold, or other container and set aside. Pour 2 inches of water into the bottom part of a steamer and bring the water to a boil. (Or set a rack or trivet in the bottom of a large pot or Dutch oven, add water, and bring to a boil.)

In a large bowl, sift together the two flours, the cornmeal, and the baking soda. Add the salt and mix. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients. Add the molasses and buttermilk to the well. Mix until almost smooth; the batter will be thick with some small lumps.

Pour the batter into the mold and cover with a lid or greased foil secured with a rubber band. Set the mold in the top half of the steamer (or on the rack in the pot). Cover, reduce the heat to a simmer, and steam the bread for 3 hours. It's done when a toothpick inserted in the center of the bread comes out almost clean, with a few crumbs still attached to it. Remove the bread from the steamer and let it rest for 5 min. before unmolding.

*The rich flavor of Boston brown bread needs little embellishment. Spread a little cream cheese or butter on a slice if you like, but plain is good, too.*

*Judy Monroe is a food and health writer based in St. Paul, Minnesota, where warm Boston brown bread helps her fight the winter blues. A former cooking instructor, she has co-written three cookbooks. ♦*

## TRY OTHER FLOURS OR DRIED FRUITS FOR VARIATIONS ON BROWN BREAD

You can't make many alterations to the basic recipe or you may stray too far from the traditional taste and texture. Here are some of my favorite variations.

♦ For other whole-grain loaves, follow the master recipe, but omit

the rye and substitute 1 cup of oat flour (which lightens and sweetens the loaf), buckwheat flour, or barley flour.

♦ To lighten the loaf in weight and color, follow the master recipe, but in place of the whole-wheat flour,

substitute 1 cup of all-purpose, unbleached flour.

♦ Dried fruits plump up during the long steaming and add sweetness. Follow the master recipe. When the batter is mixed, fold in 1 cup of raisins, cranberries, or chopped figs.

# Making

An inlay of fresh herbs makes this delicate pasta a fragrant partner for a seafood filling

BY ALAN TARDI



Author Alan Tardi drapes a sheet of fazzoletti dough to show its translucence and colorful pattern. All those herbs translate into flavor and fragrance on the plate.

Pasta and fresh herbs are paired frequently in Italian cooking, but never so beautifully as in *fazzoletto*, which means handkerchief. As the name suggests, the pasta is shaped into a large, thin square. Cooks in the northern region of Liguria toss the pasta sheets on a plate and drizzle them with pesto or a walnut sauce. Southern cooks layer *fazzoletti* in a pan and cover them with tomato sauce to make a baked dish that resembles lasagne. The version I'm presenting here borrows from these various traditions but includes my own twist—I “sandwich” fresh herbs between two layers of the pasta.

## HERBS ADD COLOR AND FLAVOR

I roll out a long sheet of pasta, scatter half of it with fresh herbs, lay the other half over, and then roll again. I end up with a beautiful sheet of translucent pasta—the simple handkerchief becomes a delicately patterned silk scarf.

Few Italian housewives (the unofficial standard-bearers of the art of pasta making) would take the trouble to imprint the herbs, opting instead to simply toss herbs with the pasta after cooking. But for a special meal, I think the reward is worth the extra effort.

**A flavorful benefit from a decoration.** The pasta is really beautiful, but the technique isn't just culinary lily-gilding. Encasing the herbs between two sheets of pasta preserves the individual fresh flavors of each herb, and it allows the herbs to blend subtly, bite by bite, with the filling. With my version of *fazzoletto*, the sauce is served underneath the pasta, so the herbal print elevates the look of the dish to something exciting beyond plain white pasta.

**An appealing dynamic between pasta and filling.** When I serve *fazzoletto*, I'm offering a surprise to the diner, since the drape of pasta hides what's underneath. I like to see how each person approaches the dish when they start to eat. The cautious, tentative



# Handkerchief Pasta

## Prepare the dough



**Mix the dough.** Shape the flour into a well and put the eggs, oil, and salt in the center. With a fork, whisk the eggs until well mixed. Knock in a little flour from the edge of the well and mix it into the eggs. Continue mixing in a little flour at a time until the dough becomes too stiff to work with the fork.



**Knead the dough.** Keep adding flour by pressing and folding the ingredients together. When the dough has absorbed as much flour as it can, scrape up the remaining flour and sift it back onto the work surface, discarding the dried bits. Knead the dough, pushing with the heel of one hand and pulling with your other hand.



**Test the dough.** Knead until the dough is no longer sticky and it feels smooth and resilient. When you poke the dough, it should spring back (see the ball at left). Wrap it loosely in plastic and let it rest for at least an hour or up to a day. When the dough is relaxed enough, it won't spring back when you poke it (see the ball at right).

eaters carefully peel back the layer of pasta to display the filling. The aggressive, frontal-attack types take a knife and fork and cut right through the middle to see what's inside.

### CHOOSE CHUNKY FILLINGS AND DELICATE HERBS

Many filling combinations are possible, but it's important to avoid strong game flavors or fillings that are too spicy because they'll overwhelm the delicate flavor of the herbed pasta. Light stews or chunky ragoûts are most successful because they add a third dimension to an otherwise flat presentation.

In spring, I might drape the pasta over leeks, fresh morels, and fiddlehead ferns; vine-ripened tomatoes and fresh basil provide a sweet, light accompaniment in summer; in autumn, wild mushrooms and white truffle oil are a frequent choice. For this article, I'm preparing a favorite winter filling, a rich

shellfish ragoût. It's an extremely easy filling (the whole thing can be made in one sauté pan), which will give you more time to devote your energies to making the pasta sheets. (See the recipe on p. 57.)

**Tender herbs for the pasta.** As for your choice of herbs to go into the pasta, use what's fresh and available, as long as it's tender. Parsley, cilantro, small basil leaves, chervil, tarragon, and dill are all good choices. You can mix flavors or pick only one or two. Just be sure to choose flavors that work well with your filling. I wouldn't use rosemary, thyme, or even oregano because their textures are tough and their flavors are slightly harsh when eaten raw.

### MAKE A SUPPLE DOUGH BY HAND

I like to make my pasta dough by hand, rather than with a food processor or mixer, because I have more control over the finished consistency of the dough. Also, making a batch of pasta for four people will

## Enclose the herbs



***Roll the pasta and add herbs.** Cut the dough in half, lightly flour the work surface, and roll each half about 8 inches wide and as thin as possible. Keep one half covered as you work on the other. Do not dust the top surface of the dough with flour. Arrange the herbs in an even layer over one sheet.*



***Enclose the herbs.** Check for heavy stems that might poke through the pasta; remove them. Lift the second sheet and lay it, unfloured side down, over the first. Gently roll lengthwise until the sheet measures about 8x32 inches.*

take about 10 minutes, which is much quicker than the time it would take to wash and dry an appliance.

The pasta dough for the *fazzoletti* should be smooth, supple, and by the time you're ready to shape it, it should have lost a lot of its elasticity. While you want to develop a certain amount of gluten so that the finished pasta has some body, you don't want it to become too stiff. This is another advantage handmade dough has over machine-made dough—you'd really have to work hard to overwork the dough by hand, while with a machine the dough can become too stiff before you realize it.

**Flour types and amounts can vary.** The flour you use will really make a difference in the texture of the finished pasta. Italians use a very fine, soft flour called "00," similar to our pastry flour. I use a blend of all-purpose and Italian 00, but you can use half all-purpose and half cake or pastry flour, or even straight all-purpose if you like. The amount of flour you'll need to use will depend on the type of flour, the size of the eggs, and even the humidity on the day you're making it. The photos on p. 55 should help you find the right consistency.

**A cool rest makes a more pliant dough.** The final step of making the pasta dough, which is a long, cool rest in the refrigerator, will also improve the pasta's texture. The cold and rest relax the gluten, making the dough easier to roll into thin sheets. You

can really see the difference in elasticity in the "poking" photos on p. 55.

### ROLL THE DOUGH THIN FOR DELICATE RESULTS

The challenging part of *fazzoletti* comes in the rolling. The goal is to roll two very thin, rectangular sheets. You cover one sheet with fresh herbs, lay the second sheet on top, and then roll the two together to make one single, herb-flecked sheet.

At the restaurant we use large pasta rollers, which crank out a thin sheet that's the right width, about 8 inches. Most home pasta rollers will only give you a narrow strip of dough, but you can start your *fazzoletti* by rolling the dough through a few times (but only to the fifth notch so it doesn't get too thin). This will give you a strip about 5x26 inches. Continue from that point with a rolling pin. Or you can skip the machine altogether and roll the dough entirely by hand.

**Control your urge to dust the dough with flour.** When you roll *fazzoletti*, it's very important to keep the upper side of the pasta sheet as moist and free of flour as possible. This is so that when you join the two sheets of dough, they'll stick properly and fuse into one thin, herb-filled sheet. Your dough shouldn't be sticky, but if the rolling pin sticks a bit, coat the pin with a thin film of flour and keep trying. The underside of the pasta sheets can be dusted liberally with flour; you can brush it off before cooking.



Ditto for when you've joined the two sheets together—use as much flour as you need to help you roll, and brush it off before cooking.

When your herbed pasta sheet is thin enough so you can see the outline of your hand through it, it's ready to use. If you make the pasta ahead, layer the squares with plastic wrap or waxed paper, seal in plastic, and refrigerate for up to two days.

### BOIL THE HANDKERCHIEFS, TWO BY TWO

Cooking the handkerchiefs is as easy as boiling any pasta. Use lots of water, be generous with the salt, and pay attention so you don't overcook the fresh dough, which only needs about three minutes in the water.

The slightly tricky part is managing the big sheets, which are slippery and prone to tearing. I find that cooking two at a time in a very large pot and fishing them out with a large, flat strainer (called a spider) works well. Drain the pasta sheets for a few seconds on a clean dishtowel. When the excess water is gone, lift each sheet and gently drape it over your filling.

### Dough for Handkerchief Pasta

Flour amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and volume (cups). Use either measurement. *Yields enough dough for four servings.*

**10 to 13½ oz. (2¼ to 3 cups) flour (all-purpose or an equal mix of all-purpose and cake flour); more for rolling**

**3 eggs**

**1 tsp. olive oil**

**½ tsp. salt**

**1½ cups fresh herb leaves, lightly packed (choose small leaves of flat-leaf parsley, basil, tarragon, chervil, cilantro, dill)**

### Tomato-Shellfish Ragoût

*Yields enough for four fazzoletti.*

**½ lb. bay scallops**

**½ lb. peeled and deveined large shrimp**

**1 Tbs. olive oil**

**1 large clove garlic, minced**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste**

**½ cup dry white wine**

**One 28-oz. can tomatoes in purée, chopped coarse (you should have about 2 cups total tomatoes and purée)**

**⅓ cup rich homemade shellfish stock or chicken stock or low-salt canned chicken stock boiled to concentrate the flavor**

**1 Tbs. chopped parsley**

Pat the scallops and shrimp dry. Heat a large frying pan until hot, pour in the oil and add the shellfish. Sauté over medium-high heat, shaking the pan, until the shellfish start to become opaque, about 2 min., and then add the garlic. Season with salt and pepper. Sauté 1 min. and then transfer the shellfish to a plate with a slotted spoon. Deglaze the pan with the white wine and cook until the wine has reduced to about 2 Tbs. Turn the heat to high and add the tomatoes, tomato purée, and stock. Simmer until slightly thickened, about 5 min., and add the parsley. Return the shellfish to the sauce and simmer 1 min. to warm through. Taste and correct the seasonings.

## Trim and cook the pasta

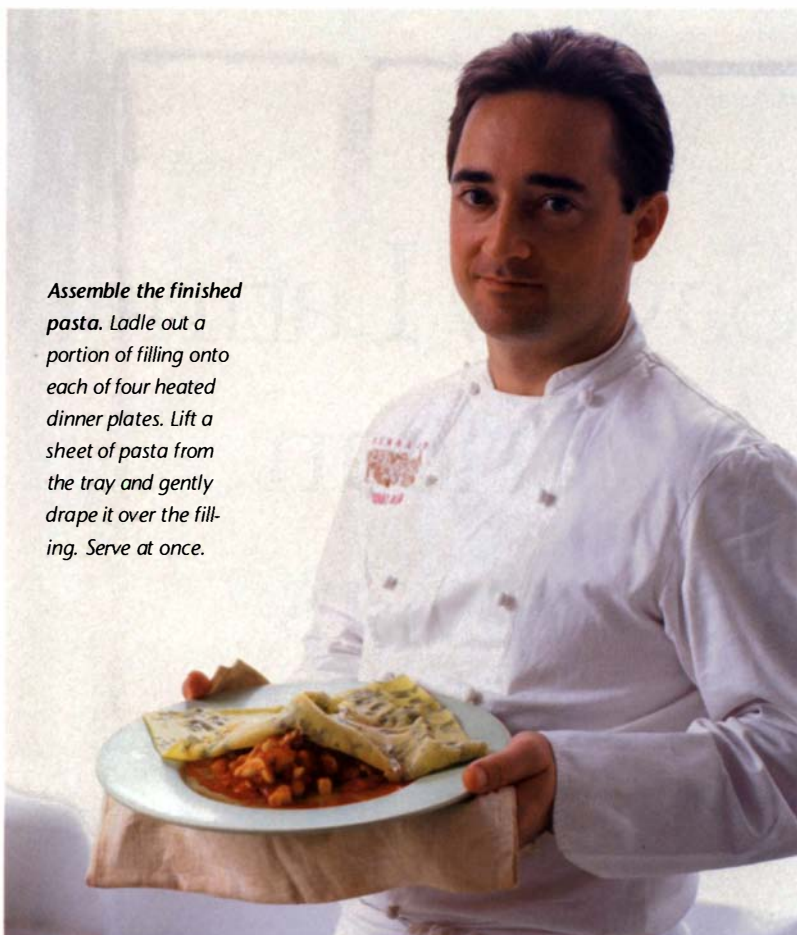


**Trim the fazzoletti.** With a pastry wheel or a knife, cut the sheet into four squares and trim the edges, if necessary. Brush off any excess flour.



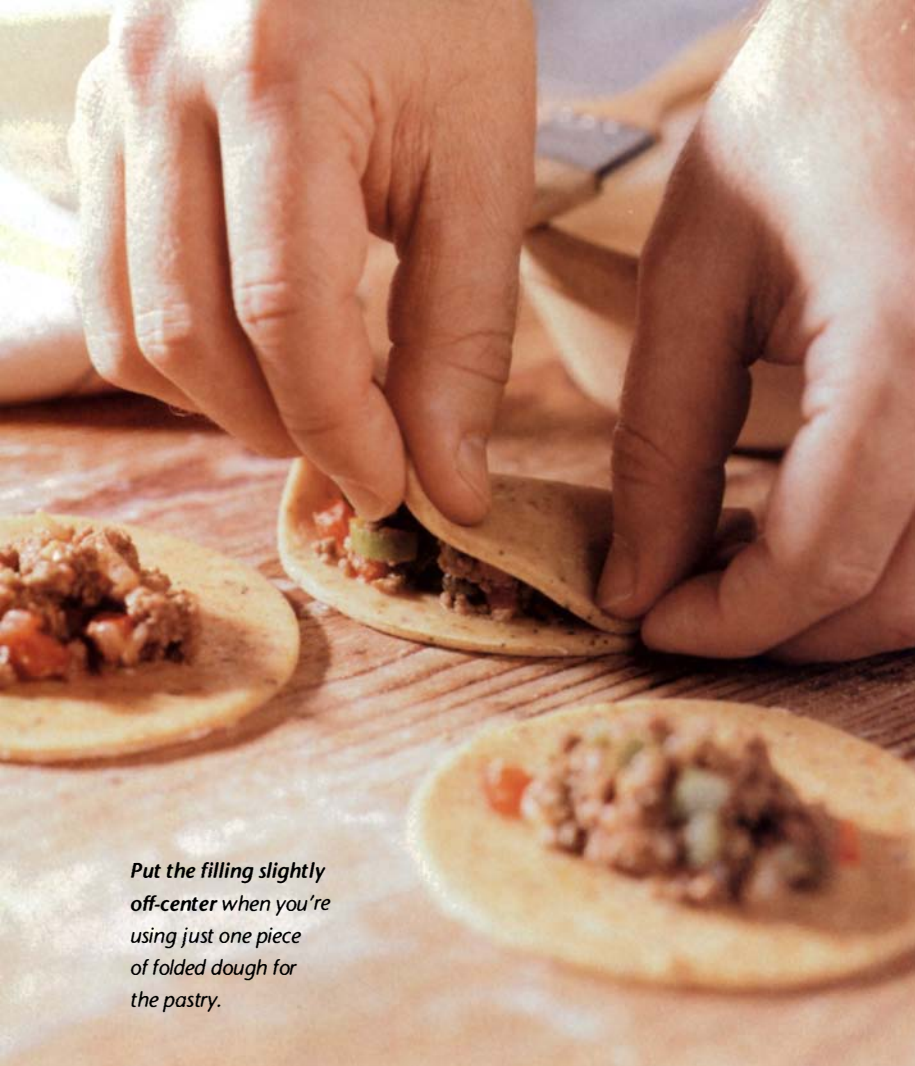
### Cook the fazzoletti.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil, add salt, and add the pasta squares, two at a time. Boil until tender, about 3 minutes. Lift the sheets out of the water with a large, flat strainer or slotted spoon, and drain them on a tray covered with a dishtowel.



**Assemble the finished pasta.** Ladle out a portion of filling onto each of four heated dinner plates. Lift a sheet of pasta from the tray and gently drape it over the filling. Serve at once.

Alan Tardi is chef/owner of Follonico restaurant in New York City. ♦



Put the filling slightly off-center when you're using just one piece of folded dough for the pastry.

# Savory Latin-American Turnovers

Wrap pastry around a richly flavored filling and you've made an empanada

BY DOUGLAS RODRIGUEZ

The idea of folding pastry over a filling to make a little pie seems to have occurred to cooks in almost every part of the world. Walking through my neighborhood in New York City, I can find many versions of what I grew up calling an *empanada*. At the local pizzeria, *calzones* are stacked in the window. There's an Eastern European deli where I sometimes buy *pierogi*, and when I order appetizers at an Indian restaurant, I always have *samosas*. My own restaurant, Patria, features food from Latin America, and empanadas are always on my menu.

**Empanadas are an invitation to improvise.** Only two things are necessary to make an empanada—a dough and a filling. What the dough is made of and how you fill it are all up for grabs. At every step along the way, you can add an ingredient or change the shape, size, or cooking method.

## CHANGE THE FAT AND YOU CHANGE THE FLAVOR AND TEXTURE OF THE DOUGH

Doughs can be made with cornmeal or different types of flours, but the one ingredient that will most determine the flavor and texture of your pastry is the fat you choose. Throughout Latin America, lard is the fat of choice for making tender pastry with a rich, distinctive flavor. Vegetable shortening makes a tender, flaky dough without adding much flavor. Doughs made with butter have a wonderful flavor and are firm rather than flaky. For fried empanadas, I use an oil-based dough. Oil makes a less absorbent pastry that fries up crisp and browns evenly. Of course, these fats can be combined to get the best of what any single one has to offer.

**Spices, herbs, and other seasonings can also flavor the dough.** Depending on the filling, I may add lemon zest, curry powder, paprika, or poppy seeds to the dry ingredients of the dough. Sometimes I simply press cracked black pepper or seeds (sesame or cumin, for example) onto the outside of the empanadas before baking. When I make sweet empanadas, I like to sprinkle the tops with sugar.

## FILL WITH MEAT, POULTRY, FISH, CHEESE, EVEN FRUIT

I can't think of many ingredients that wouldn't taste great in an empanada. Ground-beef *picadillo* (see p. 60) is a classic empanada filling. The mushroom and cheese is simply a combination I love. A little bit of an expensive ingredient, such as lobster or duck, can be stretched further when made into a filling. Seafood and fish make great fillings, too. Fruit and cheese, alone or combined, are perfect for dessert empanadas.

Leftovers also make great fillings. The last of a stew, the end of a roast, uneaten vegetables, or sauce leftover from pasta can all be put inside an empanada. When I was young, my mother often made



extra servings of dinner so she would have leftovers to fill empanadas the next day.

**Whatever the filling, it must be intensely flavorful.** Reduce thin sauces and season fillings well to get the most flavor from them. When you take a bite, you want to be sure the filling isn't lost to a mouthful of pastry. There are only a few bites to an empanada, so be sure each one is full of great taste.

#### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once you've prepared the dough and the filling, assemble the empanadas. If the filling is hot, let it cool to room temperature. A hot filling will melt the fat in the dough and make for gummy pastry. Divide the dough in half and work with one piece at a time; store the rest in the refrigerator. Keeping the dough as cold as possible until it goes into the oven helps prevent shrinking and makes for flakier pastry.

Roll the dough about 1/8-inch thick; if your filling is wet, roll the dough a little thicker so the filling doesn't soak through. Then cut the dough into shapes. Circles can be folded into half moons; squares into triangles. Or cut two pieces of dough and seal them together.

The amount of filling you use depends on the size of your empanada. Be careful not to add too much, or the pastry will burst. If you're using one piece of dough that's to be folded, spoon the filling slightly to one side of the center. If your pastry consists of

two pieces of dough, put the filling in the middle of one piece of dough.

Brush the edges with an egg wash before pinching them together. This helps seal the pastry and prevents the filling from leaking out the sides. Flute the edges if you like or simply press with the tines of a fork. I like the way an egg wash brushed on top gives a nice glaze to the baked pastry. If you want to add more seasoning to your empanada, sprinkle the top with cracked peppercorns, seeds, or sugar.

Put the empanadas on a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet and refrigerate for 30 minutes before baking. Chilling gives the gluten a chance to relax, making for more tender pastry and less shrinking.

When you take the empanadas from the oven, let them cool slightly on a rack before serving. Cooling on a rack allows the steam to evaporate without condensing on the bottom and making them soggy. Though empanadas are fine eaten alone, I like to serve them with fresh salsas. Sweet empanadas are a perfect excuse for scooping up some ice cream.

*A splash of vinegar gives a sharp accent to the mushroom filling for these bite-size turnovers.*



*Use an egg wash to help seal the dough. You want the filling in the empanada, not bubbling out on the baking sheet during cooking.*



*Note: Flour and butter amounts are listed by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups or tablespoons). Use either measurement.*

## Wild Mushroom & Cheese Empanadas

Manchego is a pleasantly salty cheese that's made from the milk of sheep that graze on the plains of La Mancha in Spain. If you can't find it, substitute Parmesan or Dry Jack cheese instead. Yields about 18 four-inch empanadas.

### FOR THE FILLING:

1 Tbs. olive oil  
1/2 small onion, diced  
1 clove garlic, diced  
1/4 lb. button mushrooms, stemmed and diced  
1/2 lb. mixed wild mushrooms, stemmed and diced  
2 tsp. balsamic or red-wine vinegar  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1/2 cup grated manchego cheese  
1/4 cup roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley

### FOR THE DOUGH:

13 1/2 oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour  
2 tsp. salt  
1/4 lb. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small cubes  
1 egg, lightly beaten  
3 Tbs. sherry vinegar or red-wine vinegar  
1/4 cup plus 1 Tbs. ice water  
2 eggs beaten with 2 Tbs. water for an egg wash

**To make the filling**—In a large frying pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Cook the onion until soft, about 5 min. Add the garlic, mushrooms, vinegar, and 1/4 tsp. each of salt and pepper; cook until the mushrooms have released their water and the pan is almost dry, 20 to 30 min. Remove from the heat and let the filling cool completely. Add the cheese and parsley; toss well. Taste for seasoning and add more salt and pepper if needed.

**To make the dough**—In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut in the chilled butter pieces until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the egg, vinegar, and water; mix until

well blended. Turn the dough out onto a sheet of plastic wrap and knead gently for a few seconds until you have a smooth dough. Wrap well and chill for at least 5 min.

On a lightly floured surface, roll half the chilled dough to 1/8 inch thick. (Keep the other half refrigerated until ready to use.) Cut out 4-inch squares. Spoon about 1 Tbs. of the filling slightly off center of each square. Moisten the edges of the dough with the egg wash and fold one corner over to the opposite side to form a triangle. Seal the edges with the tines of a fork. Repeat with the remaining dough. Refrigerate the empanadas on greased or parchment-lined baking sheets at least 30 min. Heat the oven to 375°F. Brush the tops of the empanadas with the remaining egg wash and bake until well browned, about 25 min.

## Beef Picadillo Empanadas

The pastry for this empanada, seasoned with poppy seeds and paprika, is a bold counterpoint to the filling. Yields about 18 four-inch empanadas.

### FOR THE FILLING:

1/2 lb. lean ground chuck  
1/3 cup diced white onion  
1/4 cup diced red bell pepper  
1/4 cup diced green bell pepper  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
1/3 cup peeled, seeded, and diced tomato  
1 Tbs. drained capers  
2 Tbs. green olives, minced  
1 Tbs. tomato paste  
1/4 cup dry red wine  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

### FOR THE DOUGH:

13 1/2 oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour  
2 tsp. salt  
1 1/2 tsp. paprika

1 tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
1 tsp. poppy seeds  
1/2 cup plus 2 Tbs. vegetable shortening, chilled  
1/2 cup ice water  
2 eggs beaten with 2 Tbs. water for an egg wash

**To make the filling**—In a frying pan, cook the beef over medium heat until lightly browned, about 5 min. Remove from the pan with a slotted spoon and set aside. Cook the onion, peppers, and garlic in the same pan until the onions are tender, about 5 min. Return the meat to the pan; stir in the tomato, capers, and olives. Meanwhile, stir the tomato paste into the wine until well combined. Add this to the pan and cook until the mixture has thickened slightly, about 10 min. Season to taste. Set the mixture aside to cool.

**To make the dough**—In a large mixing bowl, sift the flour, salt, and paprika. Mix in the pepper and the poppy seeds. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut the shortening into the dry ingredients until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Add the water all at once and blend until a ball has formed. Turn the dough out onto a sheet of plastic wrap and knead gently for a few seconds. Wrap well and chill for at least 5 min.



*The tines of a fork are a pretty—and easy—way to seal the dough.*

*Cut to fit your appetite. Empanadas can be large enough to serve one as a main dish or as small as a single-bite hors d'oeuvre.*







*Empanadas can be dessert, too. Spicy poached figs in a lemon-flavored dough make a comforting ending to a meal.*

On a lightly floured surface, roll half the chilled dough to  $\frac{1}{8}$ -in thick. (Keep the remaining dough refrigerated until ready to use.) Cut out 4-inch circles. Spoon about 1 Tbs. of the filling slightly off-center of each circle. Moisten the edges of the dough with the egg wash, fold each circle in half and seal the edges with the tines of a fork. Repeat with the remaining dough. Refrigerate the empanadas on greased or parchment-lined baking sheets for 30 min. Heat the oven to 375°. Brush the empanadas with the remaining egg wash and bake until well browned, about 30 min.

## Fig & Cheese Empanadas

Slightly tangy cream cheese is the perfect foil to figs stewed with port and rum. *Yields 18 four-inch empanadas.*

### FOR THE FILLING:

$\frac{1}{2}$  lb. dried figs, diced  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup port wine  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup dark rum  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. ground cinnamon  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp. ground allspice  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar  
 2 tsp. beaten egg yolk  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. cream cheese, at room temperature

### FOR THE DOUGH:

$13\frac{1}{2}$  oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour  
 2 tsp. salt  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, chilled and cut into small pieces  
 Freshly grated zest from 1 lemon  
 1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice  
 2 tsp. vanilla extract  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup ice water  
 1 egg beaten with 1 Tbs. water for an egg wash  
 3 Tbs. sugar for sprinkling

**To make the filling**—In a heavy-based saucepan, combine the figs, port, rum, cinnamon, allspice, and sugar. Bring to a simmer, reduce the heat, and cook, partially covered, until the figs are very tender, 15 to 20 min. Remove from the heat and refrigerate until cooled completely, about 3 hours. Combine the egg yolk and cream cheese and mix until well blended. Add the cheese mixture to the figs.

**To make the dough**—In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt. With a pastry blender or two knives, cut in the butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Combine the lemon zest and juice, vanilla, and water and add to the dry ingredients all at once; blend until a ball has formed. Turn the dough out onto a sheet of plastic wrap and knead gently for a few seconds until you have a smooth dough. Wrap well and chill for at least 5 min.

On a lightly floured work surface, roll half the chilled dough about  $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick. (Keep the remaining dough refrigerated until ready to use.) Cut out 4-inch squares. Spoon about 1 Tbs. of the filling slightly off center of each square. Moisten the edges of the dough with the egg wash and fold one corner over to the opposite side to form a triangle. Seal the edges with the tines of a fork. Repeat with the remaining dough. Refrigerate the empanadas on greased or parchment-lined baking sheets for at least 30 min. Heat the oven to 375°F. Brush the tops of the empanadas with the remaining egg wash and sprinkle with sugar. Bake until well browned, 25 to 30 min.

*Douglas Rodriguez learned to make empanadas from his Cuban-American mother. He is the chef/owner of Patria in New York City.* ♦

Well balanced  
and razor sharp,  
this versatile  
knife can  
become your  
most treasured  
kitchen tool

BY BARBARA TROPP



# Clean Cuts with a Chinese

For the past fifteen years, my everyday companion in the kitchen has been my svelte, beautifully balanced, razor-sharp Chinese cleaver. It's a tool to which I'm singularly attached. I take it everywhere: across town when I'm cooking at a friend's; across the country when I'm appearing at a benefit; overseas when I'm teaching in Italy or France. What a red Porsche is to some, my Chinese cleaver is to me: an eye-catching bit of precision machinery that's tremendously fun to use.

## ANATOMY OF A CHINESE CLEAVER

There are two simple gauges of a cleaver's quality: the look of its parts and the feel of it in your hand. The basic parts are the blade, the handle, and the juncture between them. A well-made cleaver will have a strikingly tapered blade, a smooth polished handle, and a solid bridge between the two that conceals any edges that might otherwise dig into your palm. The cleaver should feel both heavy and comfortable; it should be weighted so that when you hold the handle, the tip of the knife immediately falls down, indicating a properly heavy blade.

While stylistic details among good cleavers vary, I prefer one with a gently rounded knife-edge for rock-mincing, with subtle grooves cut in the handle for a better grip, and with a juncture (where the blade meets the handle) that fits

pleasantly in the palm. My favorite Chinese cleaver is made in the United States by Dexter (508/765-0201). It has all these features as well as a super-stainless blade. Moreover, it outperforms every Asian-made cleaver I've ever used.



*Two kinds of cleaver meet most needs. For chopping through bones, grab the "big knife" (left); for everything else, reach for the "vegetable knife."*



*Nothing beats a cleaver for hacking through bones or cutting fish steaks. When using the bone-chopping "big knife," grip the handle with all five fingers. In this slamming motion, the shoulder is the locus of movement.*

Photos: Rita Maas





*A gentle grip is best for cutting vegetables. Rest your thumb on one side of the blade, your index finger on the other side, and curl your three middle fingers around the handle. For closer work, move your hand forward on the handle and your middle finger onto the blade.*

in China, this cleaver is designed to cut vegetables and boneless meats. Its rectangular blade measures about 8 inches long, 4 inches wide, and  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch thick on top, tapering to a fine, sharp edge. Besides cutting, this versatile tool is also excellent for scooping, smashing, pulverizing (using the broad side of the blade), and tenderizing (using the blunt end of the handle as a mini mallet).

The other type of Chinese cleaver is a hefty bone chopper, called the “big knife.” It weighs 1½ pounds and sports a thick blade that cuts through bones like butter. In most Chinese kitchens, and in my own, this knife is used less often than the vegetable knife but is irreplaceable for cutting up whole birds and big fish steaks and for the occasional bit of kitchen theatrics. The stubbier Western meat cleaver can accomplish some of these tasks, but I find it awkwardly small and lightweight.

#### HOW TO PREVENT SORE BACKS AND SLOW CUTTING

The way to master the use of a cleaver is relaxed practice. Be sure your spine is straight, your shoulder and wrist relaxed,

your hips square to your cutting surface. Check that your board is at the proper height; when you put your hands flat on the surface, your elbows should be slightly bent. If the cutting surface is too high, stand on a box. If you’re too tall, put the box (or some other sturdy lift) under your cutting board. As silly as this sounds, it prevents sore backs and slow cutting. Once the positioning is correct, let the weight of the cleaver do the work. If you keep your fingers relaxed as they grip the handle and guide the blade, the knife will do the cutting for you.

#### SHARP CLEAVERS MEAN BETTER—AND SAFER—RESULTS

A dull knife is a sloppy knife. Vegetables get bruised rather than sliced, and precious juices are lost. Keeping a knife sharp is easy, as long as you attend to it weekly (or daily, if you use it hours each day). I find a sharpening steel the best tool for this job. I hold the steel, as the Chinese do, point side down and anchored on a wet towel on the counter to prevent slipping. I pass the knife blade downward, from back to front, first on one side of the steel and then the other, holding the blade at a consistent 20° angle. This lets the weight of the knife work for you as the blade courses against the steel. It’s really no more difficult than filing your nails.

**To care for and store your Chinese cleaver, be especially mindful of its sharp “smile.”** I clean my knives immediately after use with hot water and dish soap and then dry them at once. For storage, either attach the cleaver to a sturdy, double-bar magnet with the edge facing away from you, or store it sharp side down in a slotted knife drawer. If neither is available, buy an inexpensive 8-inch plastic knife guard. Whatever you do, never stow your cleaver naked in a drawer; the blade can get damaged, and it can too easily cut a curious hand.

You can find cleavers, steels, and knife guards at professional knife and kitchen shops and in some Chinatown stores. With practice and patience, I’m sure you’ll come to love your cleaver as I do mine.

Barbara Tropp, author of *The Modern Art of Chinese Cooking* (Workman, 1992), brandishes her cleaver at her restaurant, China Moon Cafe, in San Francisco. ♦

# Cleaver

#### TWO CLEAVERS FOR MOST NEEDS

There are two basic types of Chinese cleaver. The most common is the everyday cleaver, which weighs  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound—almost twice the weight of a typical French chef’s knife. Called the “vegetable knife”



*For a fast route to a fine mince, keep three joined fingers lightly on top of the far end of the blade to anchor it, and loosely grip the handle with the other hand. Move the knife back and forth over the ingredient in an arc. A gently rounded knife-edge and a light grip cause the knife to rock up and down almost by itself.*



*For horizontal cuts, be sure all five fingertips “fly” above the blade’s edge. Stabilize the food on the board with the mid-section of your three middle fingers. The tips of all your fingers should arch upwards out of reach.*

# A Simple Method Tempering

BY MARK GRAY

Make  
shiny, mouth-  
watering  
chocolate  
candies with  
this easy-  
to-master  
technique

**W**e've all been seduced by the sight of chocolate candies nestled in a box. Take a bite; the candy breaks with a crisp, clean snap, and the chocolate melts smoothly on your tongue. Most people think that this kind of candy can only be made by professional candy makers. But the truth is that beautiful chocolate candies, as good as any you can buy, are really quite easy to make.

The process responsible for chocolate's smooth texture and bright sheen is known as tempering. But open any book on candy making and you'll usually find the same advice for tempering chocolate—don't do it! Tempering, the experts warn, is not suited for home cooks. This may be true for traditional tempering, in which melted chocolate is poured onto a marble slab and worked until it reaches the proper temperature. But there's a much easier technique, called the pot method, that I think works just fine.

*Begin tempering by slowly melting the chopped chocolate over a bowl of hot water, and stir until smooth.*



Photos: Ellen Silverman



# for Chocolate

## WHAT IS TEMPERING?

To understand tempering, it helps to understand a bit about chocolate. All chocolate contains cocoa butter, the ivory-colored fat in cocoa beans that's responsible for chocolate's rich flavor and smooth texture. Depending on the type and brand of chocolate you choose, the cocoa-butter content may range from 25% to more than 50%.

All the chocolate you buy has been tempered, but once melted, the temper is lost, and the process must be repeated. When tempered, chocolate is heated to a temperature high enough to melt the cocoa butter and then carefully cooled to a point at which the cocoa butter forms stable crystals. These stable crystals give chocolate its glossy sheen and smooth texture. If unstable crystals form, the chocolate will be slow to set, grainy, dull, and covered with white streaks of cocoa butter.

## POT-TEMPERING MEANS WATCHING THE HEAT

A good thermometer is crucial for proper tempering. Look for one with an 80° to 130°F range that's meas-

ured in 1-degree increments, called a chocolate thermometer. Standard candy or frying thermometers can't do the job, since they start to register at 100°.

**The pot-tempering method.** Chop three-quarters of the total amount chocolate you plan to use; leave one-quarter of it in a chunk. Put the chopped chocolate in a bowl set over hot, not simmering, water. The bowl should not touch the water, and there must be no steam that could come into contact with and ruin the chocolate. When you remove the bowl from the water bath, be sure to dry the bottom of the bowl completely. It's important to keep the work surface—and anything else that might come into contact with the chocolate—absolutely dry. Chocolate melts best when it melts slowly. Overheating can cause the solids in the chocolate to separate from the fat and clump together.

Put the thermometer in the chocolate and watch closely: dark chocolate separates at 120°; milk chocolate and white chocolate separate at 110°. Stir the chopped chocolate and, when completely melted, remove it from the heat and let it cool slightly. Add the remaining chunk of chocolate and

## TIPS FOR WORKING WITH CHOCOLATE

Keep these guidelines in mind whenever you're cooking with chocolate.

- ◆ Work in an absolutely clean, grease- and odor-free area.
- ◆ Make sure the temperature of the room isn't too hot or too cold (68° is ideal; no higher than 72°).
- ◆ Remember, chocolate is an oil-based product, and oil and water don't mix. The slightest amount of water or steam can ruin a bowl of chocolate. Everything that comes in contact with your chocolate—tools, work area, or other ingredients—must be absolutely dry.

*Remove the melted chocolate from the heat and stir to cool slightly before adding the remaining chunk of chocolate.*



*Watch the thermometer. As soon as the chocolate reaches the proper temperature (see chart p. 66), remove any that's unmelted.*





*This chocolate bark is loaded with nuts. The version pictured here is made with white chocolate and hazelnuts, but any type of chocolate or nut works well.*

continue stirring. Depending on the type of chocolate used (see the chart below), you want to bring it down to a temperature between 84° and 91°. When the chocolate reaches the appropriate temperature range, remove any unmelted chocolate. If the chocolate melts completely but the mixture is still too warm, continue stirring until it reaches the proper temperature. If your chocolate drops below the proper temperature, remove a small amount of the chocolate and reheat it carefully. Then slowly add that warm chocolate back into the cooled chocolate and stir until the mixture reaches the correct temperature. If the chocolate looks streaky, you'll have to start over (but you can use the same chocolate).

### TESTING THE TEMPER

Experienced candy makers test the temper by putting a small amount of the chocolate on their lip. If it isn't cold or hot, but tepid, the chocolate is in temper. Home cooks should try this test, too, to help them understand the process better, but they should also use a more reliable test. Simply spread a dab of chocolate on a piece of foil or parchment and refrigerate it for no longer than two minutes. If no streaks appear, and the chocolate is evenly glossy, it's ready to use.

**Hold your temper.** Once tempered, you'll need to keep the chocolate at a relatively even temperature for as long as possible while you make your candies. There are a few ways to do this. One method is to set the bowl of tempered chocolate on a heating pad set at the lowest temperature. (Cover the pad with heavy-duty plastic wrap if you're

concerned about keeping it clean.) As you work, stir the chocolate occasionally, and if it cools too much, simply increase the temperature by adjusting the heat setting. You can replace the used portions of tempered chocolate with melted lukewarm chocolate. This will not only maintain the supply, but it will also keep the chocolate fluid. Be careful not to add too much untempered chocolate at one time, or you'll take the whole batch out of temper.

**The candy recipes I'm giving here are all quite easy to make.** None require molds or complicated fillings—perfect for beginning candy makers. All of them can be stored for about three to four weeks in an airtight, odor-free container.

### STORING EXTRA CHOCOLATE

If you have any chocolate left over when you've finished making your candies, you can save it and use it again. Simply clean the sides of the bowl and allow the chocolate to solidify completely. Turn the bowl upside down and tap the bottom: the chocolate should fall right out. Wrap the chocolate in plastic wrap and store it in a cool, dry place. It can be safely retempered next time you make candy.

### Pecan-Nougat Chocolates

These candies are quite easy to make, but the taste—crunchy, caramelized pecans and dark chocolate—is pure elegance. *Yields about 36 candies.*

*¾ cup sugar  
¾ cup toasted pecans  
1 lb. good-quality chocolate*



*Caramel-clad pecans crushed to a fine powder makes a sweet and shiny topping to Pecan-Nougat Clusters.*

### TEMPERATURE RANGES FOR TEMPERED CHOCOLATE

*The temperature ranges here indicate the point at which the tempering is complete. To maintain the proper temperature, keep the chocolate set over a bowl of warm water. If the temperature falls below the range indicated here, the chocolate will be too thick to form a smooth coating; if it rises above the proper temperature, the chocolate will have to be retempered.*

Semisweet and bittersweet chocolate	86° to 91°F
Milk chocolate	84° to 86°F
White chocolate	84° to 86°F

### CHOOSING CHOCOLATE

When tempering chocolate, quality matters. The chocolate chips you love in cookies don't have enough cocoa butter to temper well. Professional candy makers choose *couverture* chocolate. The term refers to professional-quality chocolate that

has a higher percentage of cocoa butter than regular chocolate—a minimum of 32% and sometimes much as 50%. The additional cocoa butter means the chocolate will harden into a thin, glossy shell around dipped candy. It also helps to keep the melted chocolate nicely fluid so it's easy to work with. All types of chocolate—

bittersweet, semisweet, milk, and white—are available in *couverture*. Available at specialty stores, *couverture* can also be ordered from the companies listed below.  
**Albert Uster Imports, Inc.**, 9211 Gaither Rd., Gaithersburg, MD 20877; 800/231-8154.  
**La Cuisine**, 323 Cameron St. Alexandria, VA 22314; 800/521-1176.

**New York Cake**, 56 West 22nd St., New York, NY 10010; 800/942-2539.  
**Paradigm Foodworks, Inc.**, 5775 S.W. Jean Rd. #106A, Lake Oswego, OR 97035; 800/234-0250.  
**Sweet Celebrations**, PO Box 39426, Edina, MN 55439; 800/328-6722.





*The glossy sheen and smooth texture of these tempting chocolate candies are the result of proper tempering.*



*Divide the nuts into groups of three before you start assembling the Macadamia Trios. The work will go more quickly and the chocolate will be less likely to set before you're finished.*



Lightly grease two baking sheets or line them with kitchen parchment. In a heavy saucepan, melt the sugar until it turns a golden caramel color. Remove from the heat and quickly stir in the toasted nuts. Spread the mixture as thin as possible on the one of the prepared baking sheets. Allow the nougat to harden completely.

Meanwhile, temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65.

Crush the hardened nougat into small pieces with a rolling pin. You should have about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups of nougat pieces. In a food processor or blender, pulverize  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of the nougat pieces to a fine powder. Fold the remaining nougat pieces into the tempered chocolate. With a teaspoon, drop small circles of the chocolate-nougat mixture onto the other prepared baking sheet. Sprinkle the top of each candy with some of the powdered nougat. Allow to harden.

## Macadamia Trios

Walnut halves or peanuts and raisins can be used instead of macadamias. *Yields about 40 candies.*

***1½ lb. good-quality chocolate***  
***120 (about 12 oz.) whole roasted macadamia nuts***

Line two baking sheets with kitchen parchment.

Temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65. Fill a small plastic bag with about 8 oz. of the chocolate

and cut a small whole in one corner of the bag. Squeeze out 40 teaspoon-size drops of chocolate onto one of the baking sheets. Arrange three nuts in a triangle on top of each chocolate drop and allow to set.

Drop the nut trios, one at a time, into the tempered chocolate. With a dry fork, gently submerge the nuts until completely coated. Lift out of the chocolate, tapping gently on the edge of the bowl to shake off any excess chocolate. Set on a parchment-lined baking sheet to dry.

## Chocolate-Nut Bark

Toasting brings out the flavor in nuts, but cool them completely before you add them to the chocolate or you'll destroy the temper. *Yields about 1¾ pound candy.*

***1 lb. good-quality chocolate***  
***¾ lb. toasted nuts, such as hazelnuts or almonds***

Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment. Temper the chocolate following the directions on p. 65. Fold the nuts into the tempered chocolate and spread the mixture in an even layer about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch thick on the prepared pan. Let set completely. Cut into squares with a sharp knife or break into bite size pieces.

*Once tempered, you can use chocolate to temper almost anything. Try dipping strawberries, bananas, and other fresh fruits. Cocktail pretzels are delicious coated with chocolate, or try candied ginger with a thin coating of dark chocolate. Dip your favorite cookies, too; gingerbread and shortbread are particularly good.*

*Mark Gray has had a finger in the chocolate pot for more than 20 years. He owns Cacao Handmade Chocolates in Charleston, South Carolina. ♦*

## Getting the full measure of your ingredients

Measuring your ingredients may seem like the simplest part of making a recipe, but unfortunately it isn't always straightforward. The measuring system you choose and the way you load your ingredients can affect the accuracy of your measurement, which in turn can mean the difference between delicious and not-so-great dishes.

### HOW MUCH SPACE VS. HOW MUCH WEIGHT

The two measuring systems we use are measurement by volume and measurement by weight. Volume means how much space the ingredient takes up. This is expressed in gallons, quarts, pints, cups, tablespoons, and teaspoons—all of these measures are made up of fluid ounces.

Weight measurement is how much something weighs,

and dry ingredients by weight.

**Liquids are always measured accurately by volume.** Liquid ingredients are cooperative and can always be accurately measured by volume. Because a liquid flows easily, it fills a measuring cup or spoon the same way every time. You don't get air pockets with a liquid, as you can with a dry ingredient. A cup of water today is a cup of water tomorrow.

**The volume and weight of most liquids relate.** When it comes to liquid measure, there is a close correlation between weight and volume. The old rhyme "a pint's a pound the world round" is true: 16 fluid ounces (1 pint) weighs 16 ounces. This is



*"A pint's a pound" for liquids—the number of fluid ounces of volume will be the same as the number of ounces in weight.*

**Dry ingredients don't all weigh the same, like liquids do.** Here 2 cups (one pint) of beans weighs 11 ounces. Two cups of breadcrumbs might weigh only 8 ounces.



**It's easiest and most accurate to measure liquid ingredients by volume and dry ingredients by weight.**

in pounds and ounces. (These units of measurement are the American system; the metric system uses other units in the same way, but that's a discussion for another day.)

You can measure any ingredient using either of these methods, but it's easiest and most accurate to measure liquid ingredients by volume

true for all "medium-density" liquids, including water, milk, oil, eggs, cream, alcohol, syrup, melted butter, melted chocolate, and other liquids of similar viscosity. You'll rarely see a recipe in which the liquid ingredients are listed by weight, however, unless you're using a professional recipe.

**Dry ingredients are troublesome and need weight measures.** As a cooking teacher, I tell home cooks that if they want to become better cooks, they should get themselves a scale for dry ingredients. Because dry ingredients don't "flow" easily like liquids, the volume they take up can be different each time you put them in a measuring cup. Think of this as a matter of "negative space." The more space there is between the particles of flour, grains of rice, or chunks of chocolate, the more air there is in the measuring cup and the less actual ingredient.

Consider flour: in my trials, I found that 1 cup of all-purpose flour can weigh as little as 4 ounces and as much as 6½ ounces, depending on how I measured it. If you sift

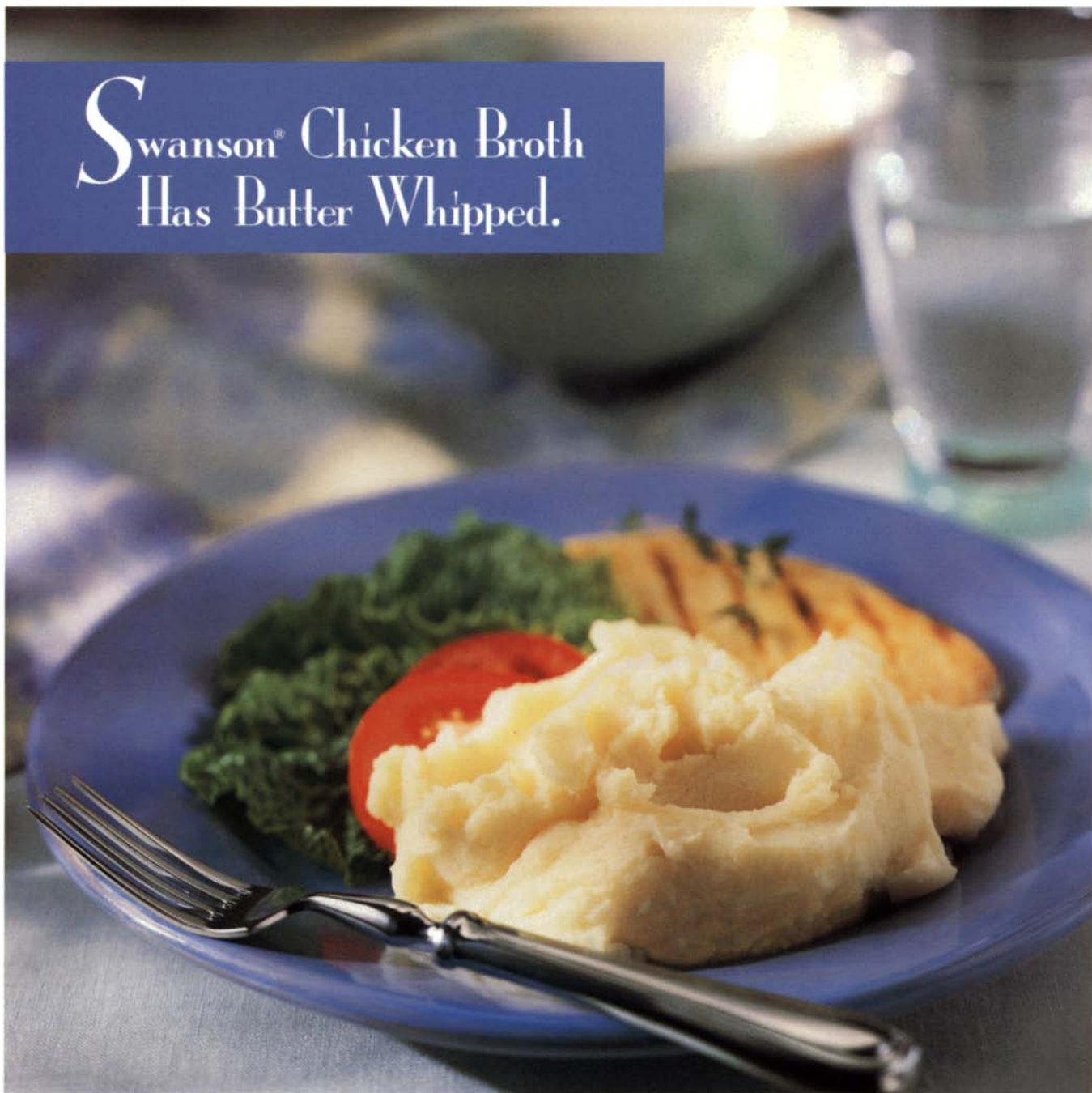
the flour before measuring it, the flour will be fluffier, more aerated, and therefore will take up more room. If you scoop the flour straight from the bag and tap the measuring cup so the flour settles, it will be very compact, and you'll get a larger amount of flour in the cup. You avoid this kind of inconsistency when you use weights—1 pound of walnuts is 1 pound of walnuts, whether the nuts are ground to a powder and compressed



**Chopped nuts take up a lot less volume than whole ones.** Both these ½ cup measures hold 2 ounces of walnuts.



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or roughly chopped and overflowing from your bowl.

**Dry ingredients have different volume-to-weight ratios.** For dry ingredients, the weight usually does not correlate with the volume, as it does with liquid, because the density of dry ingredients is usually lighter than liquids

and it varies a lot more. One cup (which is 8 fluid ounces) of dried beans might weigh 6 ounces. One cup of fresh breadcrumbs might weigh only 3 ounces.

While most recipes don't list weights, many baking and pastry recipes do, and as you repeat recipes to perfect

them, you can take note of the weights that give you the best results.

## WHEN SHOULD I BOTHER WITH WEIGHT?

Superaccurate measurement of dry ingredients is only important in recipes in which the dry ingredient plays a critical role. This includes almost all bread and pastry recipes.

◆ Flours, starches, cocoa powder, and confectioners' sugar are all best measured by weight.

◆ Granulated sugar is an exception. It flows almost like a liquid—as long as there are no big lumps in it, it will pour into a measuring cup the same way every time; it doesn't get compacted the way a lighter powder does.

◆ Nuts should be measured by weight when they are a

major part of the structure of the recipe. For example, the ground nuts in a dacquoise meringue or in a nut cake should be



*When you only need a little, don't bother with a scale. Dry ingredients in small amounts can be measured accurately by volume, using measuring spoons.*

## READ THE RECIPE FOR IMPORTANT MEASURING CLUES

The exact wording of a recipe has important clues about how to measure ingredients.

If a recipe calls for "1 cup sifted flour," sift the flour first, and then measure. If the recipe says "1 cup flour, sifted," that means you should measure 1 cup and then sift. If the recipe uses weight instead of volume, it doesn't matter what you do first—4 ounces of flour will be the same amount whether it's

aerated by sifting or not.

If a recipe has been written carefully, this shorthand will hold true for any ingredient—the instruction that follows the comma should be performed after measuring: "2 pounds potatoes, peeled" means you'll start with 2 pounds and end up with a bit less; "2 pounds peeled potatoes" means peel them first, and then weigh out 2 pounds.

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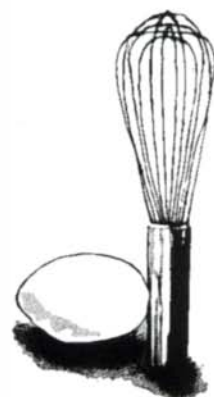
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weighed, but the nuts used just as a flavor accent in brownies or cookies can be measured in a cup. The chemistry of the recipe won't really be affected by a few more or less nuts, just the flavor and texture.

**Small amounts are fine measured by volume.** When the amount of the dry ingredient is very small (a tablespoon or two), using a volume measure is probably more accurate than weight. Most scales don't register very precisely at weights under one or two ounces, so you'll probably have more error in weighing 1/4 ounce baking powder than in spooning out 1 tablespoon. —Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, is a chef/instructor at the New England Culinary Institute in Essex, Vermont. ♦

## HOW TO GET THE BEST MEASUREMENTS

No matter which method you choose, be sure to use good equipment and to follow the recipe directions accurately.

You'd be surprised at the variance among different brands of measuring spoons and cups. I find that good-quality name brands are the most accurate and therefore worth the few dollars more than the cheapest models.

♦ **To measure liquid ingredients by volume**, use a glass cup with a pour spout. Set the cup on a level surface, fill, and bend down so you can read the calibration marks at eye level.

♦ **To measure dry ingredients by volume**, it's essential that you level off your dry ingredient. You don't want to try to measure 1/4 cup of cocoa powder in a 1-cup measure because you'd

find yourself tapping the cup on the counter to level the powder, which would settle it and compact it. Use the exact size cup or spoon called for, scoop the ingredient from the container, and level the top with the back of a knife or a spatula. Some cooks spoon the dry ingredient into the cup measure and then level, but I think scooping is easier. This scoop-and-sweep method is the measuring method that the *Fine Cooking* test kitchen uses.

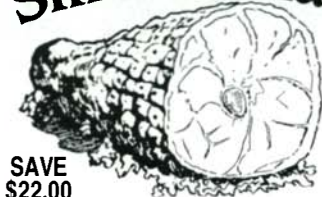
♦ **To measure dry ingredients by weight**: Most home scales have a convenient bowl or tray to hold your ingredients. (Look for an article on scales in an upcoming issue of *Fine Cooking*). I usually use a sheet of waxed paper to keep the scale clean and to make transferring the

ingredients easier. Before you put your ingredient on the scale, be sure the gauge is set to zero. Also make sure you account for the weight of any bowl or container you use. Don't set the scale to zero and then perch a basket of berries on top without knowing how much the basket weighs by itself.



Get accurate measurements by leveling off your dry ingredients.

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## Pay attention to moisture, air, and temperature for longer-lasting fruits and vegetables

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER

**H**ave you ever bought a beautiful green, leafy head of lettuce from the market, put it in the fridge, and then a few days later pulled out a bag of wilted or slimy leaves? Sure, it's best to buy and use fresh produce in the same day, but most of what we use in day-to-day cooking usually spends a little time in refrigerator

limbo. You can preserve the best texture, color, and flavor in your vegetables—especially leafy greens—by taking four simple steps: limiting moisture loss, reducing surface moisture, cutting down on oxygen, and chilling.

**Even in the refrigerator, vegetables are “alive.”** First let's look at what happens to

fruits and vegetables when they're tucked away in the crisper drawer. When you pick a piece of fruit from a tree or pull a vegetable from the garden soil, you remove it from its source of water and nutrients, but it is still very much alive. Its cells continue to conduct their normal activities. They take in oxygen and use it for metabolism: the breaking down of complex compounds into energy, water, and carbon dioxide, which the vegetable gives off. This intake of oxygen and outflow of carbon dioxide is called respiration. (This process should not be confused with photosynthesis, in which plants take in carbon

*These vegetables are wrapped and ready for a long stay in the crisper drawer. Cold temperatures, high humidity, and a little air create the right environment for storing most produce.*

dioxide and use it, along with sunlight and water, to make sugar for food.)

Slowing down respiration as well as controlling the amount of moisture in and on the vegetable will extend the shelf life and overall quality remarkably.

### **STEP ONE: LIMIT MOISTURE LOSS**

Each plant cell is turgid—rigid and firm—because it is full of water. Melons and



lettuce are 90% to 95% water, while sweet potatoes and corn are on the low end of the scale, being about 75% water. As Harold McGee put it in *On Food & Cooking*, fruits and vegetables are “elegant wrappers for water.”

On or off the plant, fruits and vegetables give off water as a part of their natural functions. When they are still attached to the plant, this isn't a problem because the moisture is replaced through the roots.

I was astonished at how long  
my lettuce lasts, now that I cut off  
its oxygen supply.

Once the fruit or vegetable is removed from the plant, however, it goes limp if this moisture loss isn't prevented. Grocery stores spray greens and delicate vegetables with a fine mist of cold water at regular intervals, which helps keep the vegetables crisp and turgid.

At home, you can limit moisture loss by using plastic

bags and plastic wrap and by storing produce in the crisper drawer of your refrigerator.

#### STEP TWO: LIMIT SURFACE MOISTURE

While it may seem at odds with the previous step, the next step in keeping produce involves cutting down on moisture, not *in* the produce, but *on* it. To keep delicate produce very crisp you must keep it quite moist, yet any surface water can cause rot. The trick

is to make sure that the produce is turgid before you store it, and to limit moisture loss through evaporation, but to also make sure that the surface of the vegetable is dry before you wrap it up.

Use a salad spinner for greens and herbs or towel-dry the produce carefully. The new perforated vegetable bags

are designed to reduce surface moisture, which causes rot and mold. What's even better is to include a layer of paper towels in the bag or plastic wrap to absorb surface moisture, and seal tightly.

#### STEP THREE: LIMIT OXYGEN

The third step to slowing respiration and extending shelf life is limiting oxygen by squeezing all the air out of the plastic bag or wrapper. Bennie Helton of The Salad Factory, a commercial supplier of fresh salad greens, says that they used to deliver greens refrigerated and simply closed in plastic bags, but now they use sealed bags with a partial vacuum, which gives the produce a longer shelf life.

I was astonished by the increase in shelf life of my lettuce at home once I began cutting off its oxygen supply. Before, I could keep a head of lettuce for about a week. Now, after squeezing out all the air from a zip-top bag, my lettuce lasts for up to a month, making it easy for me to just grab a few leaves for a sandwich.

#### STEP FOUR: CHILL

When the mercury drops, plant metabolism drops, whether the plant is on the vine or in the refrigerator, and slower metabolism means slower spoilage. Commercial produce operations cool the vegetables right in the fields immediately after picking and keep them cold all the way through packing, shipping, and marketing.

Chilling is easy, since most people store most produce in the refrigerator anyway. The crisper drawer is the ideal spot, since it's not only cold but it's also a high-humidity environment, which helps reduce moisture loss.

**Not all produce responds well to cold, however.** Tropical and semitropical fruits and vegetables, such as bananas, tomatoes, and sweet potatoes, can be harmed by refrigerator temperatures. Keep them at cool room temperature.

*Shirley O. Corriher of Atlanta, Georgia, teaches food science and cooking classes across the country. She is a contributing editor for Fine Cooking.* ♦

#### HOW TO GET CRISP, LONG-LASTING LETTUCE

*Here's my method for long-term storage of any delicate green.*



*First I add as much moisture as possible to the greens by soaking them in cold water. The more water in their cells to start with, the more will be left when you're ready to use the lettuce.*



*Next I spin off all the surface moisture with a salad spinner. Sometimes I even put the greens in a clean cotton pillowcase and spin the old-fashioned way.*



*I layer the lettuce between paper towels to absorb surface moisture and prevent mold or rot.*



*I squeeze as much air as I can from the plastic bag so my turgid, dried greens will slow their respiration and consequently slow their deterioration.*



*Fish sauce is as important to Southeast Asian cuisine as salt is to food in the West. A brand made with anchovies is the best choice.*

If you've ever tasted a Vietnamese soup or a noodle dish at a Thai restaurant and felt that there was some elusive flavor that you couldn't quite put your finger on, chances are it was fish sauce.

A staple of Southeast Asian cooking, fish sauce adds an indefinable roundness to marinades, soups, stews, sauces, and salad dressings. Straight out of the bottle, it has an undeniably fishy aroma, but once it's cooked into a dish, its briny character acts as a subtle, never obtrusive background to the other flavors in a dish.

In many Asian countries (with the exception of China and Japan), fish sauce has been used since ancient times as a seasoning and condiment much like soy sauce or salt. In

Thailand, it's a component in fresh chile sauces along with garlic, lemongrass, and coconut milk. Fish sauce also enhances a whole range of Thai stir-fried noodle dishes, including *pad thai*. In Vietnamese soup-stews of beef, poultry, and seafood, fish sauce is often added at the end of cooking and again at the table for added oomph. Fish sauce is also the primary ingredient in *nuoc cham*, the sweet and hot dipping sauce for crisp Vietnamese spring rolls.

You can use fish sauce in these traditional dishes or experiment with it in your own cooking—try it in a stir-fry—but either way, use fish sauce

## Salty, Subtle Fish Sauce

This Southeast Asian seasoning adds a piquant, briny flavor to food

BY ROBERT WEMISCHNER

judiciously. If you're used to bland foods, fish sauce may seem strong at first. Take its saltiness into account and adjust any additional salt in your dish. And remember that a little of fish sauce's briny flavor goes a long way.

### FERMENTED FISH GIVE THE SAUCE ITS FLAVOR

The process for making fish sauce is simple and has remained relatively unchanged over time. First, the fish—usually anchovies—are spread in a single layer and set out in the sun to dry for a few hours. The tiny fish are then layered into spigoted barrels or vats with salt and water and weighted to keep them submerged. Left in the hot sun, the mixture ferments. After three months of aging, the liquid is drawn off very slowly, transferred to a ceramic urn, and aged another month before it's bottled for sale.

**The first extraction is considered the best** and is used as a table condiment. A portion of the first extraction is poured back over the fish, which continues to ferment for another three months. The result is a darker, saltier sauce used almost exclusively for cooking.

### BUY THE BEST FISH SAUCE

Most of the fish sauce in the United States comes from Thailand and is called *nampla*, which tastes similar to the Vietnamese *nuoc mam*. In the Philippines, there's a slightly milder version of the sauce called *patis*, which goes by the name *petis* in Indonesia.

**Quality and cost vary widely among brands of fish sauce.** The bottle's label provides some clues. Check the ingredient list to ensure the sauce was made from anchovies, which are used exclusively in the better fish sauces. The word *nhi* on the label means the sauce came from the first extraction. This Vietnamese word loosely translates as "first juice."

Your best bet is to nose around your favorite ethnic food market and ask for recommendations from the shopkeeper or other customers. My favorites are Single Crab Phan Thiet, which has a clean flavor, and Flying Lion "Phu Quoc," which is slightly sweet.

Robert Wemischner wrote *The Vivid Flavors Cookbook* (Lowell House/Contemporary Books, 1994). He's working on a book about the home cooking of Southeast Asia. ♦



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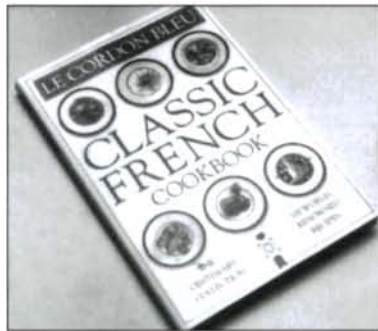
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- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1-2 tablespoons lemon zest
- 1 cup raisins

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Some of the fondest memories of my childhood in Georgia are of food. There were noontime dinners of smothered pork chops with smoky turnip greens and sweet potatoes, church suppers of fried catfish, and Sunday nights at my aunt's, where we ate country ham and butter-milk waffles.

I remember not only the tastes of southern cooking, but the sounds, too. I can still hear the singsong patter of "the vegetable lady," who walked our street twice a week, a large basket balanced precariously on her head: "I got peas, I got butter beans, I got squash and tomatoes."

I left the South long ago. Since then, I've studied cooking in Paris and cooked in restaurants in New York City, but I still love southern food. When I get homesick, these are some of the books I turn to that satisfy the cravings of my southern culinary soul.

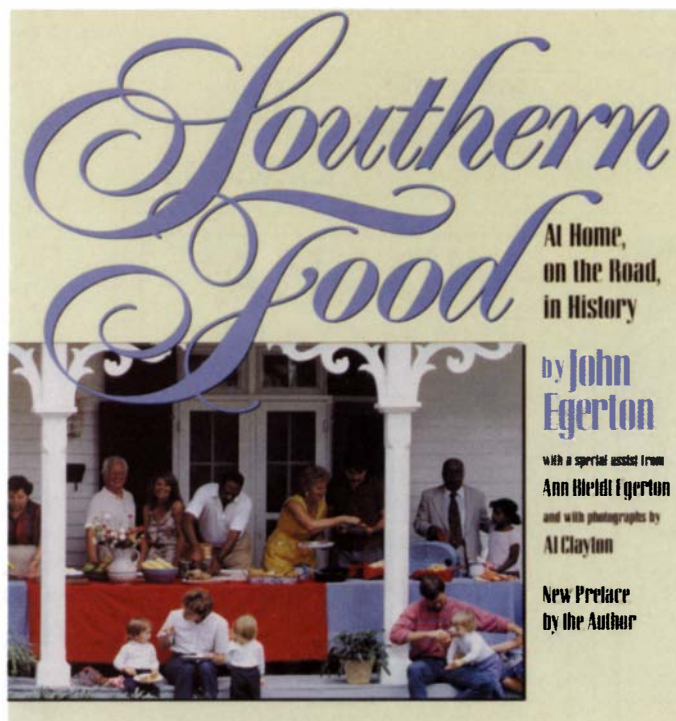
**Southern Food**, by John Egerton, a nonfiction writer from Nashville, provides a wonderful overview of southern cuisine and southern culture. In "Pass and Repast: A Gastronomical View of the South," the first of the book's three parts, Egerton examines the role of food from Jamestown in 1607 to home kitchens in the modern South. His smooth-flowing essay brought back old memories. How could I have forgotten that a Moon Pie and an R.C. Cola make a perfect snack? This and other descriptions of quirky southern food habits, like salty peanuts floating fizzily in an ice-cold Coca-Cola, make for immensely enjoyable reading.

The section called "Eating Out: Southern Food in Res-

## A Taste for Southern Cooking

Four natives describe the eccentric and genteel world of food below the Mason-Dixon line

BY CHARLES PIERCE



*An intimate history of eating—both public and private—in the South.*

taurants" is based on the author's journey to the restaurants of the Deep South. His is not necessarily a search for the "best," or the "most" or the "only." Instead, Egerton presents a variety of good ol' places to eat. While most of us might envy the assignment, the author claims it was not without its physical demands. His wife, Ann, was moved to

comment that "if [General Sherman] had stopped for barbecue and catfish as often as we have, he never would have made it to the coast."

"Eating In: Southern Food at Home," the final section of the book, is full of Egerton's recipes. You won't find formal lists of ingredients followed by neatly numbered steps. Written in narrative form, the

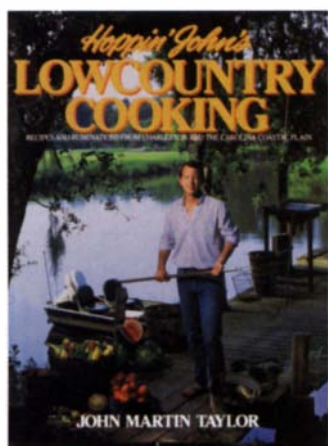
recipes read like parables. Yet his instructions are easy to follow, and the recipes work. The spicy, colorful curried chicken stew known as Country Captain is just as I remember it; Fried Okra is as good as any I've ever had. Recipes for classics such as Beaten Biscuits, Brunswick Stew, Cheese Grits, Pan-Fried Catfish, and Lane Cake indicate that Mr. Egerton knows his subject.

Some of the best reading in the book is found in the page margins where the author has collected excerpts from cookbooks, newspapers, and even novels that tell stories of food in the south. They include delightful descriptions like the one that reminds us that "the most nourishing liquid in the world is the gravy that fried ham gives up." Another example is a portion of a Senate filibuster by Huey Long, in which he instructs his fellow senators on how to fry oysters "in boiling grease until they turn a gold-copper color and rise to the top."

*Southern Food* is a great introduction to the food of the South, a charming rumination and insightful travelogue with wonderful recipes.

By comparison, *Hoppin' John's Lowcountry Cooking* is all about cooking and is limited to a smaller geographical area. The author, John Martin Taylor, sees himself as a culinary preservationist, and the recipes here are the core of his work. Working with "the philosophies from a bygone era with the traditional foods of the area," his recipes evoke a strong sense of place: the coastal plain of South Carolina, known as the Lowcountry, that stretches





*A personal look at the food of South Carolina's Lowcountry.*

from Pawleys Island southward to the Savannah River and extends inland about eighty miles.

Clearly, this is a thorough look at the local cuisine. Many of the recipes are for

**How could I have forgotten that a Moon Pie and an R.C. Cola make a perfect snack?**

dishes not often heard of outside the Lowcountry. Awendaw is a baked savory custard made with hominy. Shrimp & Grits is a local favorite, as is Frogmore Stew, a shrimp, corn, and sausage concoction. The game section includes recipes for cooters (turtles), coons (raccoons), gator tail, and squirrel.

Taylor put a lot of effort into these recipes, and it shows. His Carolina Pilau, a traditional rice dish, is a lesson in simplicity and good eating. His biscuits are sublime, especially

if you follow his instructions for using a soft, southern flour. The gingerbread is good and cakey, just the way it should be. I loved the flavor of Bessie's Crab Cakes, but I didn't heed the warning that "they usually fall apart." Some of the recipes are too heavy for my taste. Stewed Okra & Tomatoes would be better if some of the bacon fat were poured off. Still, the recipes are generally excellent and representative of the European, African, and West Indian influences that make this cuisine unique.

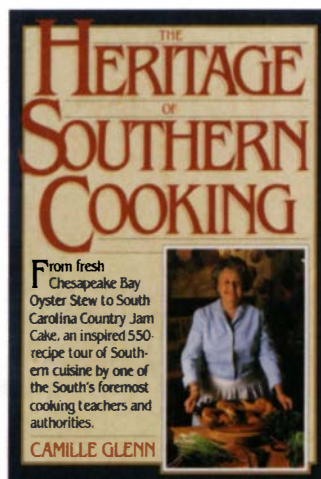
Hoppin' John, as the author is known (the nickname refers to the traditional southern dish of black-eyed peas and rice), offers mail-order sources for such delicacies as real lard, mill-ground cornmeal, good Carolina rice, and quail. His enthusiasm for the food and love for the region resonate throughout the book.

The simply titled *Southern Cooking*, by the late Bill Neal, is not just another excellent book. This is a great reference work, a slim volume that contains most of the consummate formulas for good southern cooking. Mr. Neal ran res-



*Recipes for such southern classics as Boiled Peanuts and Topsy Parson.*

taurants in North Carolina, and his professionalism is apparent. The book includes equipment lists, notes on ingredients and techniques, serving suggestions, and precise cooking times.



*A chatty Kentucky caterer shares recipes and tales of southern life.*

The recipes work well, and the results are satisfying. Martha's Chicken Pie has a rich, golden crust that covers velvety sauced chicken. Grated Sweet Potato Pone is easy to prepare and has good flavor. Huguenot Torte, made with native pecans, works like a charm and tastes great.

Camille Glenn's *The Heritage of Southern Cooking* is an ambitious collection of more than 500 recipes. At first glance, not all of them sound particularly southern. I looked askance at her Goat Cheese in Oil & Herbs, but was charmed by the story about a young farmer making goat cheese in Kentucky. Aunt Nellie's El Paso Chili comes from her mother's sister, who lived in Texas for many years. The book is crammed full of charming tales and sundry bits of engaging information.

Rather than being overwhelmed by the vast array of it all, I was left wanting more.

Glenn, the daughter of Kentucky innkeepers who loved nothing more than to talk about food, has taught cooking, has run her own catering business, and has long been a writer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Her credentials are impeccable, her book irresistible.

Especially noteworthy is her chapter on cakes, cookies, and pies. South Carolina Jam Cake with Creamy Caramel Frosting, Late Harvest Ginger Cake, and Southern Heirloom Cake are old-fashioned recipes that appeal to this southerner's sweet tooth. Just reading the titles will make even the laziest cook want to get into the kitchen.

The small but well-chosen photographs, the numerous sidebars, and the storytelling headnotes all add up to an important work that's best savored slowly and thoughtfully.

#### **PUBLISHING INFORMATION**

*Southern Food*, by John Egerton. University of North Carolina Press, 1993. \$18.95, softcover; 408 pp. ISBN 0-8078-4417-9.

*Hoppin' John's Lowcountry Cooking*, by John Martin Taylor. Bantam, 1992. \$24, hardcover; 345 pp. ISBN 0-553-08231-0.

*Southern Cooking*, by Bill Neal. University of North Carolina Press, 1989. \$13.95, softcover; 204 pp. ISBN 0-8078-4255-9.

*The Heritage of Southern Cooking*, by Camille Glenn. Workman, 1986. \$15.95, softcover; 480 pp. ISBN 0-89480-117-1.

*Charles Pierce, born and bred in Columbus, Georgia, is a food writer who lives in New York City.* ♦

Send event announcements to *Calendar, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Be sure to include dates, a complete address, and the phone number to call for more information. Listings are free, but restricted to events of direct interest to cooks. The deadline for entries in the June/July issue is March 1.

## CALIFORNIA

**49th Annual Carrot Festival**—January 20–28, Holt Park, Holtville. Carrot cooking and recipe contest, carrot cookery luncheon, barbecued rib cook-off, and more. Call 619/356-2923.

**50th Annual Riverside County Fair & National Date Festival**—February 16–25, Riverside County Fairgrounds, Indio. Held in the date capital of the world, the festival includes exhibits of over 100 varieties of dates and citrus, cooking contests, and demonstrations. For information, call 800/44INDIO.

**Monterey Wine Festival**—March 28–31, Monterey Conference Center, Monterey. For more information, call 408/656-WINE or 800/656-4282.

**3rd Annual Napa Valley Mustard Festival**—February 3 through March 30, Napa Valley. Food and wine festival celebrating the beauty of Napa Valley's wild mustard, which comes into bloom from mid January through March. Events include wine tastings, a "Taste of Yountville," intimate winemaker dinners, and a grand gourmet benefit event showcasing Napa Valley restaurants, wineries, and wine country gourmet products. Call 707/259-9020.

## FLORIDA

**Wine Appreciation Series: Wines of Tuscany**, February 20, South Pointe Seafood House, Miami Beach. Sponsored by the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call Phyllis Festinger at 954/962-6772.

## ILLINOIS

**Seafood & Red Wine Pairing Dinner**—March 5, Four Seasons Hotel, Chicago. Seafood paired with red Bordeaux wines from Château Pichon-Longueville Comtesse de Lalande. Meet the vineyard owner, Madame May-Eliane de Lencquesaing, and noted English wine writer Clive Coates, MW. Sponsored by the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call Sandy at 708/963-7100, ext. 200.

## INDIANA

**Maple Sugaring Days**—February 5–29, Prairie Creek Park, Terre Haute. See maple syrup being made the old-fashioned way, with maple sap gathered and boiled in a wood-fueled evaporator. Call 812/462-3391.

**Parke County Maple Fair**—February 23–25 and March 1–3, Billie Creek Village, Rockville. See syrup being made at maple sugar camps, have a maple syrup pancake breakfast, view displays by Parke County's maple producers, and visit the Butcher Shop for fresh-cured bacon and ham. For information, call 317/569-3430.

## KENTUCKY

**Cook's Choice**—March 7 through April 19. Home cooks are invited to vote for their favorite cookbook authors from the Julia Child Cookbook Award nominees. If your entry is selected in the drawing, you'll win an all-expenses-paid trip for two to the Julia Child Cookbook Awards gala on April 27 in Philadelphia. Sponsored by the International Association of Cooking Professionals. Entry deadline: April 19. For a ballot, call 502/581-9786 or write to the IACP, 304 West Liberty St., Suite 201, Louisville, KY 40202.



## MINNESOTA

**Twin Cities Food & Wine Experience**—February 2–4, International Market Square, Minneapolis. Tastings of specialty foods and wine, plus the latest in kitchen technology and new products. Seminars and demonstrations on how to taste wine, bake bread, brew your own beer, cook with mushrooms, and more. Also a grand tasting, a gala winemaker dinner, and a Champagne brunch. Call 612/371-5800.

## MISSISSIPPI

**21st Annual World Catfish Festival**—April 13, Belzoni. Held in the catfish capital, this is the world's largest catfish fry. Call 601/247-4838.

## NEW MEXICO

**National Fiery Foods Show**—March 1–3, Albuquerque Convention Center. Exhibit and tastings of hot and

spicy foods, cooking demonstrations and cookbook signings, plus kitchenware and art. For a brochure, send a postcard to Sunbelt Shows, PO Box 4980, Albuquerque, NM 87196, or call Mary Jane Wilan at 505/873-9103.

## NEW YORK

**Chinese New Year Dinner**—February 8, The James Beard Foundation, New York City. Acclaimed chef and cookbook author Susanna Foo will prepare a special feast for Chinese New Year. Call Claudia or Krista at 800/36-BEARD or 212/627-2308.

**U.S. Beer & Food Festival**—March 11, Bridgewater's at the South Street Seaport, New York City. Twenty-five U.S. microbrewers and local restaurants pair food with beer in this gala tasting. Sponsored by the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call 212/447-0456.

## TENNESSEE

**Taste of Chattanooga**—Leap Year's Day: February 29, Convention & Trade Center, Chattanooga. Area restaurants, caterers, and drink establishments will compete for "The People's Choice Award" in this food and drink tasting extravaganza. Call 423/265-4397, or write to the sponsor, The Kidney Foundation of Chattanooga, 620 Cherokee Boulevard, Chattanooga, TN 37405.

## TEXAS

**Texas Hill Country Wine & Food Festival**—April 11–14, Four Seasons Hotel, Austin. Call 512/329-0770.

## WASHINGTON

**Frugal Gourmet Lunar New Year's Dinner**—February 18, Sea Garden Restaurant, Bellevue. An educational evening with Jeff Smith, featuring an 11-course traditional Chinese New Year's dinner and celebration. Sponsored by the American Institute of Wine & Food. Call Norma Rosenthal at 206/236-6108.

## WEST VIRGINIA

**1996 La Varenne Signature Series**—February 18 through April 19, The Greenbrier Resort, White Sulphur Springs. A series of eight week-long culinary programs featuring Anne Willan and world-renowned chefs and guest teachers. Celebrity chefs include: Dean Fearing, The Mansion on Turtle Creek; Walter Scheib, executive chef for The White House; André Soltner, founder of Lutèce; Julia Child, cookbook author and teacher; Mary Ann Esposito, TV chef—"Ciao Italia"; Jeff Smith, The Frugal Gourmet; and Graham Kerr, international TV chef. **March 10–15:** Special pastry and baking week, featuring chefs/cookbook authors Nick Malgieri, Roland Mesnier, and Rose Levy Beranbaum. Call Riki Senn at 800/228-5049.





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## ADVERTISER INDEX

AGA Cookers 81  
Alta Loma Enterprises 81  
Antique Mall  
& Crown Restaurant 15  
Armeno Coffee 81  
Auricchio Cheeses 11  
B & L Specialty Foods 22, 80  
Banton Peppermills 21  
Becky's Country Meats 79  
Berres Brothers 82  
Bilinski's Mailbox Gourmet 81  
Bladesmith's Inc. 81  
The British Shoppe 80  
Chef Mark A. Carter 80  
Chef's Collection 81  
Chefwear 12  
Chesapeake Bay Gourmet 80  
Chesapeake Express Ltd. 82  
Chile La Isla 80  
Colavita Olive Oil 18

Contadina 87  
Cookbooks by Morris Press 82  
EarthStone Wood-Fire Ovens 81  
Eden Foods 11, 13, 75  
Elephant Brand Basmati Rice 7  
Embellishments 82  
Exotic Game 21  
Fungus Foods 79  
G & R Publishing Co. 80  
Game Sales International 70  
Genuine Canadian Bacon 75  
Hamilton Bargain Books 81  
Harrington's 71  
Heartymix 80  
Hendrix Farm 75  
James Page Brewing Co. 79  
Kelly & Sons 82  
Le Cordon Bleu Book, Video 75  
Le Jardin du Gourmet 81

Lifetime Career Schools 80  
Liz Seeber Books 82  
Mariner Tours 70  
Middlesex Farm 82  
Mugnaini Imports 13  
Muirhead of Ringoes 80  
North West Mushroom Co. 82  
Pacific Provisions 80  
Pennsylvania Culinary 13  
Peter Kump's N.Y. Cking School 71  
Phillips Mushrooms 81  
Professional Cutlery Direct 79, 82  
Professional Home Kitchens 80  
Rafal Spice Co. 82  
Red Crane Books 15  
Rums of Puerto Rico 5  
School of Culinary Arts 79  
Scottsdale Culinary Institute 79  
The Secret Garden 79

Shaw Guides 80  
Shopper's Delight 81  
Somerset Gourmet Beef 11  
Sullivan College 22  
Sun Burst Farms 80  
Swanson Broth 69  
Swissco Foods 79  
Table Setting Video 82  
Taylor Fladgate Port 2  
Teitel Bros. 82  
Top Hat Co. 81  
Uncharted Grounds 79  
Upton Tea Imports 81  
Vacmaster 82  
Watkins Products 13  
Western Culinary Inst. 79  
Wilma Saxton 81  
WoodPrairie Farm 80  
Zebra Products 95

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## RECIPES

## COVER RECIPE

Chicken Pot Pie 26

## APPETIZERS

Beef *Picadillo* Empanadas 60Classic Steamed Mussels  
in White Wine 31Mussels Stuffed with  
Spinach & Parmesan 32Wild Mushroom & Cheese  
Empanadas 60

## BREADS

Boston Brown Bread 53

DESSERTS, CAKES  
& PASTRYCaramelized Allspice Oranges &  
Chocolate Mousse 49

Chocolate-Nut Bark 67

Fig &amp; Cheese Empanadas 61

Grapefruit Upside-Down Cake  
with Rosemary 48Lemon Tart with  
Dried Sour Cherries 49

Macadamia Trios 67

Pecan-Nougat Chocolates 66

Rough Puff Pastry 27

Winter Fruit Compote 43

## MAIN DISHES

## Fish/Shellfish

Angel Hair Pasta with Mussels &  
Spicy Tomato Sauce 32Classic Steamed Mussels  
in White Wine 31

Thai Mussel Soup 33

Tomato-Shellfish Ragoût 57

## Meat

Short Ribs Braised in Red Wine 42

## Poultry

Chicken Pot Pie 26

## PASTA

Angel Hair Pasta with Mussels &  
Spicy Tomato Sauce 32

Handkerchief Pasta 57

## SALADS

Curly Endive with Walnuts,  
Pears & Goat Cheese 37

Fresh Beet Salad 41

Simple Salad of Watercress,  
Leek & Fennel 37Spinach Salad with Roasted  
Sweet Potatoes 36

Winter Squash Slaw 37

SAUCES, CONDIMENTS  
& SEASONINGS

Hot Cider-Bacon Vinaigrette 36

Walnut Oil Vinaigrette 37

## SIDE DISHES

Mashed Potatoes  
with Parsley Root 43

Winter Greens with Garlic 43

## SOUPS, STEWS &amp; STOCKS

Thai Mussel Soup 33

## TECHNIQUES

Baking empanadas 59

Candying zest 48

Cleaning mussels 30-31

Cutting with Chinese cleavers 62-63

Filling empanadas 58-59

Flavoring butter 44-45

Making rough puff pastry 24-27

Menu-planning 39-41

Pairing citrus with other flavors 50

Pot-tempering chocolate 65-66;  
testing the temper 66Roasting chicken & vegetables for  
chicken pot pie 24Steaming Boston brown bread 52;  
mussels 31

Turning pastry 24-27

Zesting citrus 48

## INGREDIENTS

Butter, choosing for compound  
butter 44; softening 44Chocolate, choosing 66; melting  
65-66; pot-tempering 65-66;  
storing 67; tips for working  
with 65Chicken, roasting for chicken  
pot pie 24Citrus, candying zest 48; choosing 48;  
pairing with other flavors 50;  
sectioning 47-48; zesting 48Compound butters, flavoring 44-45;  
freezing 45; mixing 44-45  
rolling 45; sautéing flavorings 44;  
storing 45Empanadas, baking 59; filling 58-59;  
sealing 59

Fats' effects on dough 58

Handkerchief pasta, cooking 57;  
filling with herbs 55-56;  
making 55-56; rolling 56Mussels, buying 29-30; cleaning  
30-31; storing 30; steaming 31Vegetables, roasting for chicken pot  
pie 24Winter greens & vegetables,  
choosing 35; storing 35

Zest, candying 48

## TOOLS

Chinese cleavers, choosing 62;  
cleaning 63; storing 63;  
types of 63; using 62-63

## NUTRITION INFORMATION

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Page	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
		total	fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
Chicken Pot Pie	26	1070	61	42	64	72	34	27	7	255	820	6	
Classic Steamed Mussels in White Wine	31	170	22	22	8	4.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	50	340	0	
Angel Hair Pasta with Mussels	32	590	18	31	87	12	2	6	2	40	580	7	
Mussels with Spinach & Parmesan	32	380	55	27	12	23	12	6	2	115	820	1	
Thai Mussel Soup	33	310	22	18	37	8	1	1	3	35	750	2	
Spinach Salad with Sweet Potatoes	36	240	28	5	42	7	1	1	3	0	200	7	
Cider-Bacon Vinaigrette	36	420	78	6	5	37	14	14	5	40	420	0	4 Tbs.
Winter Squash Slaw	37	120	6	1	30	1.0	0	0	0.5	0	190	6	
Salad of Watercress, Leek & Fennel	37	150	86	1	5	14	2	11	1	0	180	3	
Endive, Walnuts, Pears & Goat Cheese	37	380	53	12	36	23	6	5	10	15	400	5	
Walnut Oil Vinaigrette	37	130	98	0	1	14	1	3	9	0	60	0	4 tsp.
Fresh Beet Salad	41	200	67	4	15	15	2	11	2	25	300	3	
Short Ribs Braised in Red Wine	42	370	52	37	3	21	9	9	1	110	800	1	
Mashed Potatoes with Parsley Root	43	150	28	3	24	4.5	3.0	1.5	0	10	170	3	
Winter Greens with Garlic	43	120	31	5	14	6	1	4	1	0	590	5	
Winter Fruit Compote	43	100	0	2	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	
Grapefruit Upside-Down Cake	48	520	57	8	52	33	15	13	3	60	50	3	
Allspice Oranges & Chocolate Mousse	49	400	62	4	44	28	17	9	1	60	55	2	
Lemon Tart with Dried Sour Cherries	49	510	36	10	77	21	11	6	1	190	80	2	based on 1/2 tart
Boston Brown Bread	53	310	5	7	69	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	<5	670	5	based on 1/8 bread
Handkerchief Pasta	57	350	15	13	61	6	1	2	1	160	320	3	
Tomato-Shellfish Ragoût	57	190	23	25	12	5.0	0.5	2.5	1.0	105	600	5	
Wild Mushroom & Cheese Empanadas	60	160	43	5	18	8	4	3	1	50	360	1	per empanada
Beef <i>Picadillo</i> Empanadas	60	180	47	6	17	9	2	4	2	35	350	1	per empanada
Fig & Cheese Empanadas	61	210	35	3	30	8	5	2	0	35	310	2	per empanada
Pecan-Nougat Chocolates	66	90	53	1	12	5	3	2	0	0	0	1	per candy
Macadamia Trios	67	140	73	1	12	11	4	7	0	0	0	2	per candy
Chocolate-Nut Bark	67	160	79	3	10	14	3	10	1	0	0	2	per ounce

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in

the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

# Stella's Cookies

**M**y great-aunt Stella, who lived to be 102, made the best cookies I've ever tasted. Ginger creams, snickerdoodles, date- and raisin-filled cookies. I can taste them as I write their names and remember their smell as if they were sitting on her Wisconsin kitchen table in front of me.

When I would go to Boy Scout camp, one of the most anticipated events was a box of her cookies. Stella lived 40 miles and another era away in Camp Douglas, a Main Street town with raised, wooden sidewalks and a train station that existed to service the nearby Army staging camp.

My sister Mary would stay with Stella, and the two of them would take a Sunday drive to visit me. From across the flat farm field I could see my Methodist maiden great-aunt struggling up the long dirt road, carrying a cardboard box tied up with string. The coffer of cookies would be taken immediately to my tent.

I'd break the string and splay open the cardboard flaps to reveal a trove of ginger creams with sugar frosting, date-filled cookies, and perfect circles of snickerdoodles rich with butter and cinnamon. Like Midas with his gold, I counted them. Anyone lucky enough to be in the tent could have one, and then the box would be sealed like some confectionery ark. Suffice it to say that they never got stale.

Stella was used to cooking for farmers. Once, when I was



about five or six, Stella served cookies at breakfast. "A little something sweet for breakfast," she said. At the tender age of five, this was a revelation. The cookies followed a trencherman's array of eggs, thickly sliced home-cured bacon, toast cut from homemade loaves, and jams from dusty cellar shelves. There was always some kind of pie in the kitchen, too. But I lusted after

**Like Midas with  
his gold, I'd count  
the cookies and  
then seal them up.**

the cookies. They were so perfect: one cookie filled your hand. Truth be told, when I made them for the first time as an adult, I made them big enough to fill my now much larger hand.

My favorites were the date- and raisin-filled cookies. Plain-as-the-brown-box-they-came-in brown sugar cookies on the

outside, they gave no hint of the rich filling within. With all the dates and raisins, you could almost convince yourself they were actually good for you.

My brother Tom was partial to the ginger creams. Redolent of blackstrap molasses, the dark ginger cream was the perfect foil for the snowy frosting swiped across the top. If Stella had just made them, the frosting would still be creamy. If it had been a while, the frosting would have set into a candy-like carapace. Whatever its consistency, Tom would lick and gnaw the frosting off before biting into the cookie.

The recipes tended to be imprecise because they had never been written but rather passed along from generation to generation, through hours and years of kitchen apprenticeship. When Stella turned 91, I wanted to make sure her culinary skills didn't die with her. I asked her for the recipes. Her reaction was a snort of disbelief. For her, baking these cookies was as much second nature as tying shoes.

"A handful" and "two fingers' worth" were what I got for measurements. "Bake in a hot oven until done" was the extent of the baking directions. But all I could get was an unworkable, sticky batter that wouldn't roll out. I added more and more flour until, in frustration, I called Stella, long distance from Manhattan to Camp Douglas.

Now all but deaf, she could only hear me if I shouted. I told her how much flour I had added and asked what I could do to salvage the mess.

A week later, I received a note in her shaky scrawl. "The amount of flour in the original recipe is 'about 4 cups.' Aunt Em Audley usually made them and she usually got the right amount. She stirred them with a tablespoon and when she thought it about thick enough, she stood the spoon up in the dough and it was to tip very slowly. Experience will teach you about that. That goes slowly, too."

—Bo Young,  
New York, New York ♦





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to be eaten one at a time.



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